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## Countering the "Strong School" Narrative: Community Response to Racial Inequity in a High-Performing District

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Countering the “Strong Schools” Narrative:  
Community Response to Racial Inequity in a High-Performing District

A Dissertation Presented

by

KATIE A. LAZDOWSKI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2017

College of Education

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Community Response to Racial Inequity in a High-Performing District

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **COUNTERING THE “STRONG SCHOOL” NARRATIVE: COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO RACIAL INEQUITY IN A HIGH-PERFORMING DISTRICT**

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Based on a 20-month ethnography, this research examines the discourse and actions of community members and their role in sustaining/resisting racial inequities in a high-performing school district. Using the lens of racial literacy and by applying the construct of implementational spaces from the field of language, policy and practice, this research unveils the role community members’ varying racial literacy practices serves in sustaining the existing racial inequities. Additionally, informed by decolonizing and humanizing research methodologies, this research examines the use of researcher-participant collaborative practices between the white researcher and participants of color.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*Robert: I think we've been more messed up by racism that any of us can really face. And at the same time, I think it's a very hopeful time in history. You know the Black Lives Matter movement*

*Katie: There's a lot of momentum*

*Robert: There's a lot going on. And as much as it looks like racism has flared and is way worse than ever—it is more public than it has been*

*Katie: There's communication around it, which is huge.*

*Robert: Nothing really racist becomes public without stimulating a response. That's new. It was not always like that. So we are actually in the best position we've ever been in to keep moving forward and build something. (Interview with Robert<sup>1</sup>, white male, 12-18-15)*

Robert's remarks capture the intensity of the racial climate in the United States at the time this research was conducted. The frequent episodes of police brutality and shootings that victimized and killed people of color had provoked the birth of movements such as Black Lives Matter. Born out of the deaths of dozens of black men and women<sup>2</sup>, this movement was established July 13, 2013. Yet the *Black lives* versus *All lives* debate it fostered proved that the US was not the post-racial society that many claimed it to be in the wake of President Obama's election (Wise, 2012). Additionally, the media's coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton surfaced issues surrounding equity, human rights, immigration and other social issues. It raised awareness and built momentum, and division around these issues provoked discussion of

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<sup>1</sup> Names of individuals (other than my own), towns and community groups are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, Black Lives Matter was created in response to the shooting of Trayvon Martin, who was placed on trial for his own murder, and the shooter, George Zimmerman, was deemed not guilty.

difficult, perhaps even taboo topics in certain circles. Furthermore, the controversial coverage by the media fostered a layer of meta-discourse as people critiqued how the media depicted the candidates. The political climate offered individuals the chance to confirm, or question, their beliefs and stances on certain issues.

It is within this sociopolitical context that I conducted the research presented herein, which examines the outside-of-school factors that sustain/resist racial inequities in a high-performing school district.

### **Shifting Demographics**

Within the education sector, racial injustice, in the form of racial inequities, (discipline disparities, achievement disparities, graduation rates, test scores, etc.) persists in schools. In fact, over two decades ago, Carter and Goodwin (1994) noted that historically, race has been a consistent factor in determining issues of access to resources and equity in education. In her 2004 commentary, Guinier alluded to the dangers of covert forms of racial inequities, noting that racism is harder to identify post-Brown v. Board of Education because the discrimination and segregation that was upheld via Jim Crow laws is no longer. Racial inequity in education, while it has changed form, persists, a concerning factor considering students of color will comprise the majority of the US K-12 population by 2050 (Roberts, 2009). Students of color are increasingly populating the nation's schools, a shift that isn't limited to urban areas. As Howard & Reynolds (2008) confirm, despite ongoing years of "educational exclusion and disenfranchisement" (p. 81) one change that has occurred is that more students of color live in affluent neighborhoods and attend highly ranked schools (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). Such highly ranked schools are becoming increasingly racially and

socioeconomically diverse, a trend that will continue in the years and decades ahead (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

### **Statement of the Problem**

As the contents of this dissertation illustrate, the enrollment of students of color in suburban/high-performing school districts does not safeguard them against racial inequities, nor constitute an opportunity for these students to access education in an equitable climate that prepares them to succeed. In fact, statistics and research show that the academic achievement gap in many suburban school districts between students of color and their white peers is greater than that in urban communities (Alson, 2003; Diamond, 2006). Despite this, as will be discussed, there is scant literature that looks at racial inequity in non-urban settings. The existing literature examining racial inequity in and around school settings focuses primarily on under-resourced, typically underperforming schools—most commonly in urban and rural settings. While returning the blame to students of color that typically populate urban schools, this also inadequately assumes that racial inequity does not reach highly resourced, often high-performing, districts. To counter this trend, high-performing districts demand greater focus. Especially in the current climate of standardized tests, and core (often prescribed) curriculum, high-performing districts are frequently sought after for their best practices, and serve as trendsetters in the field. Targeting these districts is an important first step to provoking social change in other settings, given the connection between formal education and social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Asking *who* within these districts experiences academic success is essential, and uncovers achievement disparities between students of color and their white peers (Alson, 2003)—disparities that affect students’

lives in the form of employment status, income level, and incarceration rates (Hartney & Flavin, 2014).

Furthermore, as will be described more fully in chapter II of this dissertation, the education research that examines racial inequities focuses on the *in-school* factors that sustain the inequities; teacher practices, tracking/leveling of students, curriculum, etc. Little attention has been placed on the *out-of-school* factors—those that reach beyond the school walls- that sustain the *in-school* racial inequities.

### **Shifting the Focus**

My research addresses these gaps by examining how community members respond when evidence of racial inequities jeopardize the “strong school system” narrative used to describe the district. I examine how community members uphold the district’s official policy- its mission statement- or align with society’s de facto policy: racism. Specifically, I look at parents’, administrators’, and school committee members’ performance of *racial literacy* through their discourse and actions. Drawing on the construct of racial literacy shifts the focus from the recipients of the inequities, to those who perpetuate, sustain, or resist the inequity. And while it is common in education literature that teachers’ practices are under investigation, community members call for further scrutinizing, specifically about their role in upholding or dismantling the racial inequities that happen even in high-performing, “strong schools”. As the rising enrollment of students of color in such schools continues, it is essential that research examining racial inequity in education extends beyond urban districts and beyond classroom walls, in order to identify influential, yet often hidden factors that maintain racial inequity.

### **Cartfield: A Microcosm of Society**

In the same way I briefly contextualized the US racial climate at the beginning of this chapter, I describe now the racial climate of my research setting, in part because it was a factor in selecting Cartfield as my research site. I was initially drawn to this particular setting because of its racial demographics (with a student population reflective of the national average), and my selection was confirmed when I heard of racial tensions in the district concerning the case of Diane Sherry, a school teacher who was targeted through anonymous messages and vandalism in her school. As someone who had recently purchased a home in the area, and had bought into the “strong school” narrative, I was curious as to how the administration would address Diane Sherry’s case, particularly how this response reflected the social justice orientation of the district’s mission statement. I came to this work as a Cartfield community member myself, which afforded me an insider status in my research.

While Diane Sherry’s story is not the main subject of the dissertation, her statement, (re)ignited race-related tensions in the district by unveiling her experiences as a high school teacher of color. It was out of Diane Sherry’s situation that a number of equity-oriented groups were initiated, which provided me the context to explore my research questions. As a member of these public groups I was afforded the opportunity to act as a participant observer and share my research intentions to group members after several months when a level of trust had been established. My role as a researcher in these spaces was non-intrusive; typically I volunteered to write minutes so that my act of writing jottings would go unnoticed.

I include the statement Ms. Sherry presented via video to the Cartfield Regional High School students and staff on February 10, 2014. I began collecting data just weeks later. This is Ms. Sherry's story, which she calls: *Diane's personal story: Racism at the Cartfield Regional High School*

What Cartfield Regional High School is known for is its acceptance and inclusivity of all people regardless of race, color or creed. I came here excited to immerse myself into the life of a school that seemed to embrace fully the American experiment. What I have found working here instead is that there is a subtle exclusion that is actively at work. As one of only a few teachers of color working here at Cartfield Regional High School, I am dismayed to find an incongruity with the school's stated philosophy and my own.

My personal story since I began teaching here in September [2013] includes examples of both individual and institutional racism. On an individual level, I have been personally targeted because of my racial identity. During first trimester, on a regular October school day, a threatening note toward me was found in a bathroom. A Dean's investigation revealed it was written by a student. This experience has left me feeling very unsafe in this building. That day, it was most difficult for me to teach through to the end of E-period. As soon as school ended, at 2:20 pm, I locked my door in fear, avoiding after-school help, avoiding interactions with anyone, with everyone. I worried about my safety in getting to my car, in getting home to my special needs son whose primary support is his mother, a woman of color, a teacher at this high school where he, my son, during his high school years, refused to continue to be a student because of his own personal experiences in this building. It was Mr. Williams [the principal] who unlocked my door that afternoon and escorted me to the parking lot.

I am remembering now how I had to fight my very sense of lucidity as I walked onto Cartfield Regional High School property the following morning. While trembling internally, I entered Mr. William's office before school per our agreement for what was to be a quick check in and update on the previous day's events. Here is what unfolded instead: Mr. Williams presented me with yet another shocking revelation, another personal affront. My classroom door sign with my name and room number was defaced with a racially motivated derogatory slur. I WAS BROKEN.

In tears I left the school premises that morning unable to work, unable to perform my duties as an employee of the Cartfield Regional Public School System. My thought...How could I have been so wrong in my decision to

move to Cartfield Regional High School, to leave a comfortable position [in a neighboring town] where I worked for over ten years? As a mother, a woman of color, a mathematics teacher, a person... the insidious effects of the racism that I have endured are psychological, they are emotional, they are social, and they are physical.

My discussions with our administration since these personally distressing incidents have included a push for honest conversations about racial consciousness. My agenda is straightforward: We need to be engaged in transforming our school community into one that does not only pay lip-service to equity and equality, but one that actually does something about achieving it.

On an institutional level, I find that as a teacher of color in this school, there is very little room for my perspectives. I find that students are not equally prepared for post-secondary life. One thing that is disturbingly clear to me with the Cartfield school system is that all students are not given an equal chance for advancement. In my estimation, the system is very closely aligned with a system of structural racism and stubbornly adheres to it. In the field of mathematics, for example, Black students are systematically left out of honors classes. Based on my observations throughout this school, I question whether our general expectation for the success of students of color equates to the levels of expectations we have for White students. These ponderings leave me deeply disheartened.

There are signs, both subtle and ongoing, that prompt me to conclude that our school system does not do nearly enough to recognize the needs of students and teachers of color. Denying our needs, our ways of seeing the world, our styles of learning, our perspectives, and our experiences denies us of our humanity. It is a hard reality to embrace that we, CRHS community, are of lesser humanity and lesser importance because of our race and ethnicity. We should all be equally given a chance for advancement, and equally high expectations. Every member of our community is complicit in this system, as racism is “an all hands on deck” issue.

I challenge us to create a school community that pushes equally hard for students of color to get into honors classes as White students; that punishes with equal urgency or discretion the infractions of students of color and White students; that is as eager to teach in ways that honor the experiences and learning styles of students of color as it is to teach White students.

Everybody has to be committed to seeing racism end for it to end. Doing “little things” to make it better does nothing to make it end. Believe it or



not, the presence of racial prejudice demeans us all, it renders us all less human, and it takes from us all.

To White students: your classmates of color are simply that, classmates with the same wants, needs, desires as yourselves. They struggle with similar teenage and familial issues. To Students of Color: you are important. You matter. You are not strange or exotic. You belong here just as much as anyone else does. The way you see the world is as legitimate and valid as anyone else's view. And you are as capable of success as any other student here or anywhere.

Let us please use this opportunity to address this specific issue – that of racial inequity as practiced in this school and wider community. Let us explore it despite the discomfort it will undoubtedly bring and refrain from conflating it with other issues that often wittingly or unwittingly present an opportunity to escape a direct address of the ugliness of racism.

I am committed to seeing us all enjoy a school community of people who fill each other's lives with the wonder of each other; who each help to weave a colorful fabric of varying stories, perspectives, ways of being that makes us enriched in equal proportion.

I challenge us to create a school environment that is warm and welcoming and accommodating to all who are a part of it regardless of where we come from or what we look like or how much resources we have at our disposal. This is entirely achievable. The first step in achieving this has to be the robust desire to see it done.

This is where this discussion must begin and end: at the place of acknowledging and embracing with equal conviction the humanity of us all. For the Cartfield High School community to be a place of inclusion, high achievement, full student and teacher involvement and engagement, a place of acceptance and love, then there must be an unwavering embrace of this truth. (Diane Sherry, February 10, 2014)

Ms. Sherry's experience with racism at Cartfield's high school sheds light on a pertinent issue that demands urgent, and ongoing exploration by Cartfield school district administrators, Cartfield community members, and by education researchers. Sherry's story extended well beyond Cartfield's borders, even making national news (Source<sup>3</sup>, 4-5-15). Within Cartfield and its neighboring communities Ms. Sherry's testimony raised

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<sup>3</sup> Source name omitted to protect Ms. Sherry's identity.

awareness, but it also raised eyebrows. Sherry triggered an awareness-raising movement; groups were formed or rekindled in response to her testimony. At the same time, the subsequent interruption of the status quo caused increased tension in town.

Though the Cartfield school district is one of many high-performing school districts in the state, and in the nation, the varying responses to Diane Sherry's testimony and other unveiled racial inequities in the district make Cartfield an important entity in exposing the relationship between community members and racial inequities in education settings. It was within this context that I examined my two research questions: 1) how do Cartfield community members respond when evidence of racial inequity jeopardizes the narrative of a district's "strong school system"? and, pertaining to the dissertation's methodology, 2) what are the affordances of and constraints to researcher's and participants' roles and voices when they use collaborative practices of analysis in qualitative research?

## **Methods**

Based on a 20-month ethnography, my dissertation captures the pivotal events that transpired out of Sherry's testimony. The community groups that took up issues of equity provide the context to examine the community's response to racial inequity in their school district. As a white participant-observer/parent-activist/educator in various community groups, I analyze how meeting participants—current and former Cartfield district employees and students, family members and legal guardians of students in the district, and elected Cartfield Regional School Committee members—use these spaces to uncover, interrogate, or sustain the covert inequities that occur in the school system. I utilize critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1991) to examine participants' language

practices as they work to disrupt/maintain the power structures that sustain racial inequities in the town's "strong school system". In doing so, this dissertation addresses its first question, *how do Cartfield community members respond when evidence of racial inequity jeopardizes the narrative of a suburban district's "strong school system"?*

Additionally my dissertation addresses a second question, with particular focus on its methodological approach. Much has been written about the potentially imperialist nature of qualitative research in which "outsiders" study "others" and represent their voices in a variety of forms (e.g., Fine, 1994; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). While there is no easy approach to this problem, as education scholar with a social justice agenda, I am committed to privileging "insider" voices and knowledge—in this context, the people of color who are subjected daily to institutional racism and micro-aggressions. My goal is to operationalize this commitment through my research methods and writing. Thus, I use my dissertation to explore, and theorize the use of *counterstorytelling* as a data analysis method, and in doing so ask, *what are the affordances of and constraints to researcher's and participants' roles and voices when they use collaborative practices of analysis in qualitative research?*

### **Significance of the Research and Summary of the Chapters**

In addition to contextualizing the national and local racial climate at the time this research was conducted, this introduction identifies the larger issues in educational research this dissertation takes up. The research herein shifts the focus to the outside of school factors that sustain in-school racial inequities, specifically in a high-performing school district. As the following chapters unveil, Cartfield community members' responses were varied when presented the *covert* examples of inequity that occur in the

Cartfield district, thus displaying the importance of examining the forces *outside* of school that serve to sustain *in school* racial inequities. I look at how participants performed racial literacy through their discourse and actions; how they “critically examine and continually question how race and racism inform beliefs, interpretive frameworks, practices, cultures, and institutions” (Winans, 2010, p. 477). Use of the racial literacy construct shifts the gaze from those who experience the racial inequities to those who perpetuate them, thus holding the latter accountable. From a methodological stance this research contributes to the scholarship that examines the role of the white researcher studying race-related issues by extending the construct of counterstorytelling to the data analysis phase of the research process.

Chapter II begins with an examination of the literature pertaining to the dissertation’s first question, and connects research in school reform, community organizing, and issues of racial inequity in education. It presents the literature surrounding the concept of racial literacy in education, and situates the appropriateness for its use in this research. The latter part of the chapter explains my theoretical framework- critical race theory (CRT). I provide an overview of CRT’s role in the field of law, and discuss its tenets within educational research, paying particular attention to *counterstorytelling*. An examination of scholars’ use of counterstorytelling in CRT-oriented research, combined with a discussion of critical race *praxis* (Yamamoto, 1999; Lynn & Parker, 2006) lead to the final part of the chapter: an invitation to extend the use of counterstorytelling beyond a data *collection* tool.

Chapter III discusses the research design of the dissertation. It opens with an exploration of my positionality as a white education researcher and my place in this

research before presenting the ethical considerations in conducting this study. The second half of the chapter discusses the research design—the setting and participants, the rationale for the methodological approach, the data collection methods, and the analysis procedures.

Chapters IV, V, and VI disseminate the findings of the focal research questions. Chapters IV and V reveal the themes that respond to the first research question, whereas chapter VI focuses on the second question which concerns the study's methodology.

In chapter IV, I establish the dominant narrative in Cartfield. Drawing on interview and document data I describe the “strong school” narrative that exists. After introducing this narrative, I draw on interview, statistical data from the state's department of education website and other data sources to falsify the grand narrative by providing the counterstory. The data show that the “strong schools” are *not* working in everyone's favor, particularly Black and Latinx students. Data reveal that in response to the “strong school” narrative we must ask *strong schools for whom?* as well as additional questions that point to inequity in education.

Chapter V examines community members' discourse and actions in public spaces. It extends the use of Hornberger's (2002) *implementational spaces* from the field of language policy and practice, and uses this construct as a lens through which to examine community participants' operationalization of racial literacy. The chapter unveils how community members insert their racially literate and/or racially illiterate practices in various public spaces and the relationship between these individual acts and systemic racism.

Chapter VI shifts the focus to my second research question, and reports the findings from the collaborative data analysis sessions I held with participants of color. The organization of this chapter reflects the genre of a separate manuscript within the larger dissertation to signify that while the collaborative process informed the findings presented in chapters IV and V, the examination of the use of this approach responds to a separate research question than that which chapters IV and V address.

The concluding chapter (chapter VII) focuses on the significance of this study to the field, highlighting the importance of shifting our gaze beyond school walls, and towards districts that have not been traditionally featured in education racial inequity-related research in order to expand knowledge on inequity and racism in education practice and education research in the U.S. context. Likewise, the chapter summarizes some of the larger findings, and in doing so, highlights some of the challenges that face community members in the research context. It discusses the implications of the study from both a research perspective, emphasizing the constructs I draw on throughout this work, as well as for the Cartfield community members.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter contextualizes the research study within interdisciplinary inquiry by providing a literature review and an explanation of the study's theoretical framework. The literature review contents are informed by peer-reviewed, and non-peer reviewed (e.g. dissertations) literature from the past few decades (primarily between 2000 and 2017). To locate scholarly work I utilized *ERIC*, *Education Research Complete*, *AnthroSource* and *Academic Search Premier* databases. I also searched specific journals based on their content and/or methodological focus (e.g. *Race Ethnicity & Education*; *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*; *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*). As I have suggested elsewhere (Lazdowski, 2015) descriptor choices can aid situating the researcher epistemologically. As such, I used a variety of descriptors, and combined them in various sequences. While I conducted a preliminary literature review for purposes of my proposal, my findings chapters triggered the need to return to the literature and examine how certain constructs are operationalized in education literature. The information herein is the product of a reiterative process.

To address my first research question, Part I of this chapter examines the current education literature surrounding racial inequities in education and identifies the trends before moving into a discussion about the construct of racial literacy. The majority of Part I discusses this construct and explains its validity and usefulness in examining racial inequities. Part II of the chapter provides a literature review of the theoretical framework I apply, in order to contextualize this study in the broader equity-oriented research, as well as identify the gap that my second research question will address. First, however, I

draw on the literature to discuss race and racism and how I define them in this study. The chapter concludes by summarizing how my research contributes to the field by addressing the identified gaps.

### **Racism: A Multilayered Phenomenon**

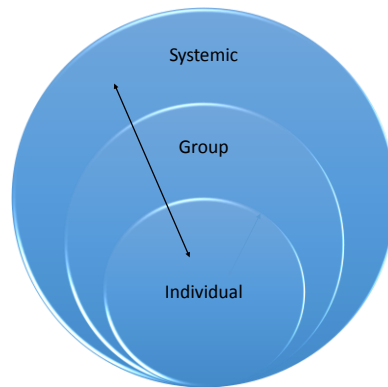
In looking at the out-of-school factors that sustain or resist in-school racial inequities, it is important to first provide some definitions to help situate this work, including *race* and *racism*. As Leonardo (2013) points out, there is no consensus about the definition of race. Because of a lack of definition, race often gets blurred with ethnicity, nationality and class, as there is no clean way to separate these constructs (Omi & Winant, 1994). Based on cultural and anthropological perspectives, I define race as a socially constructed phenomenon that is assigned to a person or a group of people based on phenotype and physical appearance. As such, what one person perceives another person's racial identity to be, may or may not align to how that person self-identifies. For example, while one may identify as African-American, if he or she has light skin color, he/she may experience privilege to which African-Americans with darker skin are not privy. Likewise, while someone may be viewed as a person of color, he/she may embody and perform whiteness, and therefore uphold the systemic racism that works against people of color (Castagno, 2014). As Warmington (2009) posits, "we live race as if it has meaning and we live within a society in which those raced meanings have innumerable consequences. We live with race as a social fact" (p. 284). In sum, just as the definition of race is fluid, so is one's interpretation of race. How we assign race to ourselves and others is informed by various factors, which leads to a discussion about racism.



Race and power intersect. In society there are constructions of racial hierarchy that position racial groups as being superior or inferior to other racial groups, thus impacting which groups of people hold power. For purposes of this dissertation I am loosely defining racism as the maintenance of this stratified system. This reflects Guinier's (2004) definition, by which she describes racism as "the maintenance of, and acquiescence in, racialized hierarchies governing resource distribution" (p. 98). As Horsford (2014) points out, these attributes are not limited to our nation's history, but rather the systems in place that continue to serve some (white people) and not others (people of color). From this perspective, whiteness studies and white privilege play an intersecting role with racism. Noteworthy is Horsford's focus on *systems*. Often, racism is commonly associated with terms such as *prejudice* and *stereotypes*, and is sometimes limited to the role individuals play in sustaining the stratified system. Yet racism is multi-layered, as is illustrated by Figure 1. It works at systemic, group and individual levels, all of which are interconnected. This is illustrated by reflecting on the (prejudiced and stereotypical) beliefs engrained in us since early in our childhoods.

Messages are sent via media, films, books, images, peoples' discourse (Smitherman & van Dijk, 1988; van Dijk, 1987); but also by way of what we don't witness—the silence around particular topics. From a young age we are sent messages that some groups are more important than others, simply by way of who is featured, or how certain groups of people are described. The discourse and social practices we are exposed to at systemic and group levels influence our individual practices. Likewise, our individual actions impact group and systemic racism as Figure 1 suggests.

Figure 1. The Multilayers of Racism (Adapted from Marino & Mattheus, 2011)



Racism's definition is often misconstrued as being the individual, overt acts of violence or discrimination by a person or group of people (what I will call a "perpetrator"), towards a person or group of people who is/are racially different than the perpetrator(s). Less commonly acknowledged is that racism does not have to be enacted in overt fashions, but rather tends to be carried out by perpetrators in covert ways. As Leonardo (2004) stated

domination is a relation of power that subjects enter into and is forged in the historical process. It does not form out of random acts of hatred, although these are condemnable, but rather out of a patterned and enduring treatment of social groups (Leonardo, 2004, p. 139).

These factors—racial beliefs and practices that are engrained in us from an early age; a misconstrued, inaccurate and limited definition of racism; as well as racism's multi-layered, interconnected nature—position racism to serve as society's de facto policy (Gee & Ford, 2011), which thus shapes the implementation of official policies (in the case of this dissertation, the Cartfield district's mission statement). Additionally, I view this de facto policy as being sustained by whiteness; "the structural arrangements

and ideologies of race dominance. Racial power and inequities are at the core of whiteness, but all forms of power and inequity create and perpetuate whiteness” (Castagno, 2014, p. 5). Whiteness, just like racism, is not necessarily enacted by malicious acts alone, but rather more commonly carried out through covert, even well-intended acts (Castagno, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

### **Part I: Trends of Inequity Reform Literature in Education**

In this section, I turn to the literature that examines inequity reform in education to identify the trends in the field. In addressing the dissertation’s first question- *how do Cartfield community members respond when evidence of racial inequity jeopardizes the narrative of the district’s “strong school system”* - my research connects literature surrounding school reform, community organizing, and issues of racial inequity in education.

School reform-related literature frequently addresses issues of inequity in under-resourced settings which is typically equated with urban and rural areas (Kozol, 2012, Lipman, 2011). In their multi-cited case study, Warren and Mapp (2011) examine community organizing efforts in six under-resourced communities around the nation. The authors examine urban settings (Chicago, Denver, New York City, San Jose, Los Angeles) and a low-income rural area (Mississippi Delta) to analyze how community groups address equity-oriented issues, and work towards reform. Reflective of those who examine the intersection of community involvement and school reform (Warren, 2005, 2011; Stone, 2001; Ishimaru, 2014; Mediratta, Shah & McAlister, 2009; Mediratta, 2007), these works offer components of constructive and unproductive community organizing strategies.

Certain scholars go beyond a discussion of “what works” (or not). Some look at teachers’ practices and how they contribute to racial inequities (Buehler, 2013; Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004). Diamond, Randolph & Spillane (2004), for example, examine teachers’ roles surrounding student performance expectations through an ethnographic approach. Others focus on particular parents’ contributive/detrimental role in community organizing initiatives (see, for example, Evans, 2014; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey, 2012 for discussions of the role of affluent parents). Many scholars focus on parents whose students experience the inequities first hand (Dyrness, 2011, 2007; Dumas, 2011; Ochieng, 2010). Yet, like Warren and Mapp’s (2011) research, these works are typically set in under-resourced, overcrowded, urban settings.

Diamond (2006), and more recently, Lewis & Diamond (2015), divert their attention from the urban setting and focus on highly resourced, suburban districts; an often understudied setting in education reform literature. Diamond’s (2006) analysis mainly draws on survey, school, and census data and thus primarily serves to uncover the discrepancies in achievement between students of color and their white peers in the district. Identifying the culture that sustains the inequities is beyond the scope of his article. Lewis & Diamond’s work (2015) also shifts our gaze from the urban setting to a suburban one. They uncover the racial inequities that exist even in a high-performing, well-resourced district, attributing such inequities to peoples’ racial ideologies and cultural belief systems. They conclude that because of the race neutrality of stated policies and how they are actually practiced, racial inequality is actually reproduced, and many of the practices that disadvantage students of color (specifically black and Latinx) actually help white students. The authors find that “even those operating with the best

intentions can contribute to negative consequences, particularly if they are operating without full awareness of and information about the ways that racial dynamics are part of daily life and beyond” (169). Important to note is the difference between intent, and impact. While white people may not *intend* to be malicious, the *impact* of their words and actions can be harmful to people of color.

Like Lewis & Diamond (2015), Castagno (2014) also discusses this idea of good, or best intentions. In her ethnographic study set in an urban school district, she examines how well-intended policies and practices surrounding issues of diversity are actually taken up and implemented. Her findings show that the implementation of such policies actually reify whiteness and sustain racial inequities. Villenas and Angeles (2013), Cerecer (2010) and Ringrose (2007) also use whiteness studies as a lens. They display the powerful combination of ethnography and discourse analysis to examine the role of whiteness in their particular contexts. Their works are exemplary of others who examine the role that discourse of participation plays in educational reform (Schultz and McGinn, 2012; Anderson, 1998), and, more generally, the connection between community involvement and democracy (Torre & Fine, 2006).

As Castagno’s (2014) and Lewis & Diamond’s (2015) recent research illustrates, constructs of whiteness inform the same “good intentions” that end up being detrimental to students of color. Well-intended people who perform whiteness cause more harm than good, often without a sense of where things went wrong (Bush, 2004). As Leonardo (2004) highlights “whites today did not participate in slavery but they surely recreate white supremacy on a daily basis” (141). This is in part because of the disconnect that white people often have to the privilege (McIntosh, 1992) that comes with the color of

their skin. Because our skin color inevitably positions us as the oppressor, unless we are *actively acting* against our white privilege, our actions help maintain the status quo. Said differently, “the unearned advantages that whites, by virtue of their race, have over people of color...is symptomatic of the utter sense of *oblivion* that many whites engender toward their privilege” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 138, emphasis added). It is this disconnect, this lack of knowledge, I argue, that works to sustain systemic racism. For this reason, I turn to the literature that examines racial literacy; a construct that shows potential to disrupting the ongoing trend of well-intended actors that sustain racial inequities through a lack of awareness; a lack of awareness that sustains “racism without racists” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). The next section defines racial literacy and examines how it has been operationalized in education literature.

### **Racial Literacy**

The construct of racial literacy in education was first introduced just over a decade ago by Guinier in her 2004 seminal piece, *From racial liberalism to racial literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-divergence dilemma*. In this commentary she highlights the flaws of the Brown decision, noting that in its aftermath, the “tactic of desegregation became the ultimate goal, rather than the means to secure educational equity” (95). Guinier continues to describe the historic ideologies that would not be changed with a single court ruling. The segregation that existed prior to *Brown* was based in a larger issue that wouldn’t be changed by a court decision: white supremacy. Guinier posits that to counter these, and other effects, there must be an awakening. “To understand why *Brown v. Board of Education* has not lived up to its promise, I propose a paradigm shift from racial liberalism to racial literacy” (100).

Since 2004 various scholars have defined and applied racial literacy differently. Within education, Horsford (2011) defines it as “the ability to understand what race is, why it is, and how it is used to reproduce inequality and oppression” (p. 95). From whiteness studies, Twine (2004) places more focus on white parents and the “resources,” “patterns of practice,” (p. 882) and “racial vocabularies” (p. 884) they use to “actively train their children to resist racism” (p. 882). Twine suggests that while the work of white parents is often hidden, it still serves as a form of anti-racist work at a macro level. As Rogers & Mosley (2008) state, an important aspect of Twine’s work is the focus she places on teaching and learning of racial literacy, a subject Rogers and Mosley take up in their research in teacher education. In this dissertation I draw on Winans (2010) definition of racial literacy: an ability to “critically examine and continually question how race and racism inform beliefs, interpretive frameworks, practices, cultures, and institutions” (p. 477).

### **Racial Literacy in the Literature**

Since the publication of Guinier’s (2004) article, many education scholars have applied Guinier’s racial literacy construct as their theoretical framework. The majority of literature that takes up racial literacy in education falls into four main categories: racial literacy in education leadership; higher education; K-12 settings; and racial literacy in teacher education. My decision to include these four subfields is deliberate, as it not only provides exposure to various conceptualizations of racial literacy, it also uncovers the trends of this construct in educational research, and thus highlights the gaps in the literature.

## **Education Leadership**

Of these four categories, discussion of racial literacy in education leadership is most sparse. In their conceptual paper, Rusch & Horsford (2009) discuss the challenges that arise in building racial literacy practices among leaders, particularly due to power issues, and the need to “relinquish the privilege of individual expertise” (p. 311). In doing so, they note the tensions that are associated with discussing race, and the consequences when school leaders feel unprepared to discuss it. In addition to maintaining silence, scholars posit that school leaders may even hold a negative stance towards diversity (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). More recent works also discuss silence as being detrimental to fostering racial literacy. In the context of school leadership, Coleman & Stevenson (2014) argue that improvement in “diversity work” (p. 87) is contingent on people accepting that racial disparities exist in schools. They describe the racial elephant in the room as being the

unacknowledged silence about the racial disparities in the school climate, a silence that makes it hard for teachers of color to raise, discuss, or face conflicts related to race. The silence is generated by the dominant culture, undermines the experiences of teachers of color, and perpetuates policies and programs that make true advancement in diversity work difficult, if not impossible (p. 88).

To overcome this, the authors state that to foster racial literacy development within their communities, leaders must be able to guide school personnel “through guided self-reflection on, mindful reduction of, and practiced engagement with the stress of racialized and privileged social interactions” (p. 90). This emphasis on the importance of the mental work in racial literacy development is echoed in Winans’ (2010) work, discussed in the next section.



In another conceptual piece, Horsford (2014) suggests that racial literacy is the kick off point, and not the end all, be all. She describes a multistep progression from racial literacy to racial reconciliation, noting that racial literacy is the first of four steps. Racial literacy is followed by racial realism, racial reconstruction, and racial reconciliation. Horsford posits that education leaders' display of racial literacy is an essential component to closing the achievement gap, while also reinforcing Singleton and Linton's (2006) position that consciousness (racial literacy) is the first step towards transformation (racial reconstruction). In a later section I highlight the significance of this idea that racial literacy development is an ongoing practice and process.

### **Higher Education**

Within the literature there is a range of definitions that scholars draw upon to define racial literacy, as well as how they position racial literacy. Some view racial literacy as having transformative capacity (as Horsford's 2014 article illustrates), and associate racial literacy as having change-making capacities by way of action. Others maintain that racial literacy is simply an ability to engage in critical conversations about race and racism. Bryan, Wilson, Lewis & Willis' (2012) study demonstrates the later. Through their use of focus group with 20 doctoral students enrolled in education programs, Bryan et al. explore the opportunities provided to students to discuss race, or engage in "race talk" (Pollock, 2004). Based on the coding process of the transcriptions from these focus groups, the authors conclude that students had varying experiences regarding the opportunities they had been provided to discuss race, and suggest that conversations about race should be incorporated into education coursework. They argue that it falls to colleges of education to produce racially literate professionals who are

“capable of *problematizing* the constructions of race and racist practices in educational settings” (abstract, emphasis added) and “who possess the ability to *articulate and analyze* the critical roles race and racism play in producing educational inequities” (p. 135, emphasis added). Here, I include Bryan et al.’s exact wording to show that their definition of racial literacy does not emphasize transformation through action, but rather is limited to one’s ability to see/notice/identify/critically examine the role that race plays in educational settings. Later I will address the limitations of Bryan et al.’s approach.

Winans (2010) and Sealey-Ruiz (2013) focus their attention on composition classes in higher education, at a private, liberal arts, college, and a community college, respectively. Similar to Bryan et al. (2012) who advocate for engagement in race talk, Winans (2010) puts the onus on white instructors, like herself, stating that it is the responsibility of the instructors to build racial literacy among their white students. She defines racial literacy as “the ability to examine critically and recursively the ways in which race informs discourses, culture, institutions, belief systems, interpretive frameworks, and numerous facets of daily life” (p. 476). Winans takes her analysis further and examines how, exactly, whites develop the ability to discuss race. She argues that we need to focus less on transferring knowledge about race and racism, and shift our gaze to examine white students’ experiences in coming to know. Because racism is predicated on a system where racism isn’t discussed, when asking them to look at the meanings of being white in a racist society, it is important to look at how emotions and ethical questions inform students’ experiences. Responding to such question is an emotional process given students’ beliefs about race and racism. Informed by her analysis of first year students’ written compositions, Winans (2010) suggests how to emphasize

emotions. She advocates that we place more attention on textual analysis, teaching students to read emotions, and develop the skills to critically analyze the function of emotions in their own experiences with race. She also suggests applying a contemplative pedagogical approach (Hart, 2003; Kirsch, 2008–09; Zajonc, 2009), or even altering the “emotional rules” that exist in our classrooms (Trainor 2008a, 2008b). By offering insight as to how to foster racial literacy within students, Winans’ work extends the conversation beyond justifying the importance of racial literacy. Racial literacy in teacher education-related literature reflects the application of racial literacy in higher education research; whereas some scholars emphasize its importance (Sealey- Ruiz and Greene (2015)), others take their analysis further and demonstrate how racial literacy can be fostered (Rogers & Mosley, 2008).

### **Teacher Education**

Within the field of teacher education recent works that examine racial literacy in the teacher education field include publications by Sealey-Ruiz & Greene (2015) and in an Australian context, Schulz & Fane (2015). Rebecca Rogers and Melissa Mosley have made considerable contributions through their examination of racial literacy development in pre-service teachers, shedding light on how this construct is “measured” or analyzed in the literature.

In their conceptual piece, Sealey- Ruiz and Greene (2015) define racial literacy as “a skill and practice in which individuals are able to discuss the social construction of race (Omi & Winant, 1994), probe the existence of racism and examine the harmful effects of racial stereotypes” (p. 60). They posit that educators who develop racial literacy practices are better equipped to discuss the impact of race on their teaching

practices, and engage in conversations to continue to explore this impact. Likewise, they allude that racially literate educators are able to notice the interconnectedness of racism's multiple layers, by noting their ability to "distinguish between real and perceived barriers in their classroom that may be linked to institutionalized systems that govern schools and society" (p. 60). They, like many (Banks, 2007; Gay, 2010; Goodwin, 1994; Grant & Sleeter, 2011; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2005a; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter, 2001) frame their argument by identifying the need for white teachers to be culturally competent in working with increasing populations of students of color. Like Sealey- Ruiz and Greene (2015), Rogers and Mosley also focus their analysis on white pre-service teachers.

In their 2008 publication, Rogers and Mosley describe their use of critical discourse analysis to examine racial literacy in teacher education. Using a pre-service teacher book club in a literacy method course as their context, they explored how teachers take up issues of racism/anti-racism through their reading of young adult literature that centers white people wrestling with anti-racism (e.g. Blume, 2001; Spinelli, 1999). They apply a racial literacy lens, defining it as "a set of tools (psychological, conceptual, discursive, material) that allow individuals (both people of color and White folks) to describe, interpret, explain and act on the constellation of practices (e.g. historical, economic, psychological, interactional) that comprise racism and anti-racism" (Rogers & Mosley, 2008, p. 110). They conduct a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2006) and multimodal discourse analysis (Norris, 2004) of fieldnotes, video- and audio- recordings, interviews, seminar and small group discussions. By looking in-depth at the details of pre-service teachers' discourse (e.g. genre and style of their speech

patterns) and semiotic language (e.g. gestures, eye gaze) Rogers and Mosley identify students' weaknesses that could be addressed to further develop their racial literacy. They note, for example, that when students discuss racism, "they used material and physical verbal processes, indicating a much clearer location of racism (rather than anti-racism) as material and physical. This suggests the need for more exposure (for all students) to examples of anti-racist actions" (p. 124). The micro-level analysis that discourse analysis offers permitted Rogers and Mosley to see how interactions shape individual racial literacy practices. They conclude that becoming racially literate is an interactive process that is derived from both support and challenge. Participants, for example, "modeled discourse, racial vocabulary and conceptual models" (p. 125) but also challenged each other's thoughts and ideas and exposed them to new ones. This finding, which I will highlight again later, reflects Bolgatz (2005) definition of racial literacy as being a socially constructed learning process.

By applying an interpretative case-study design to her research from the pre-service teacher book club, Mosley (2010) is able to focus her attention on one particular white pre-service teacher participant (Kelly). Drawing on the construct of critical race literacy pedagogy, Mosley noticed that Kelly's ability to exhibit racial literacy in a reading lesson she was teaching did not reflect the same articulate nature she reflected in her graduate assignments (e.g. journal entries, book club group work). Mosley concluded this based on her analysis of the social, historical and cultural dimensions of Kelly's racial literacy practices over a two-year period using racial literacy and sociocritical literacy frameworks (Guinier 2004; Gutiérrez 2008; Lewis, Enciso, and Moje 2006; Prendergast 2003). The results from the study demonstrate that teacher education

programs need not only “prepare teachers for identities that ‘transcend’ predictable ways of *being white*” (p. 449, original emphasis), but to develop a fuller framework of what it means to practice racial literacy in the classroom.

The work of Mosley and Rogers (Mosley, 2010; Rogers & Mosley, 2008; Mosley & Rogers, 2011) uncovers how scholars identify and label racially literate practices. Their work supports the case for the ongoing pairing of critical discourse analysis with racial literacy practice exploration. As their work posits, people practice racism through verbal and nonverbal resources, and by looking at discourse we begin to see how people perform racist and anti-racist behaviors and thus uphold racial inequities. Rogers & Mosley (2006) have also examined racial literacy in K-12 settings, as the next section describes.

### **K-12 Settings**

Drawing on Guinier’s (2004) definition of racial literacy, Rogers & Mosley (2006) applied critical discourse analysis to the ethnographic data collected in a second-grade public school classroom in the mid-west of the United States. They examined how students’ literate identities were acquired and constructed through the lenses of whiteness and race, asking how white students and their white teachers take up race in the literacy curriculum. Through their coding process and reconstructive analysis (Carspecken, 1996) they discovered participants showed examples of “noticing whiteness”, “enacting white privilege” and “disrupting whiteness or privilege” (p. 472), which show the complexity of racial construction and the “hybrid nature of emerging understandings around race”(p. 483). Their analysis builds on McIntyre’s (1997) concept of *white talk*, and takes it

beyond a set of linguistic strategies that reflect white privilege. Based on the second graders in their study the authors expand the definition of white talk and define it as

discourses associated with race and racism (rather than with colorblind theories), that seek to extend rather than shut down conversations, and where white people acknowledge whiteness and the associated privilege and take responsibility for channeling this acknowledgment into conscious antiracist actions (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 483).

Rogers & Mosley (2006) tie the significance of their findings to the potential this might hold in shifting peoples' racial literacy. Drawing on Choullaraki and Fairclough (1999) the authors explain the importance of finding evidence in the three different categories (noticing whiteness; enacting white privilege; and disrupting whiteness or privilege) noting, "the more hybrid the discourses, the more unstable (and thus open to change) the social practices. Stable discourses (e.g., consistent enactment of whiteness or even consistent disruption of whiteness) indicate social practices that are more fixed and regimented" (p. 483). The authors recommend that ongoing examination of race talk throughout peoples' lifespan be carried out using this enhanced construct of white talk. In the second-grade classroom alone they noted students were at a point where ideas surrounding privilege and antiracism could be reinforced or challenged. Their reconstruction of white talk holds great promise to identify places and spaces- what I will describe later as *implementational spaces*- where shifts can occur, and racial literacy can be further fostered.

Vetter and Hungerford's (2014) study of racial literacy in an urban high school English classroom suggests more research focus be placed on racial literacy development. Using a micro-ethnographic approach, and Gee's discourse analysis' approach (Gee, 2006), the authors explored classroom interactions to observe how students engage in dialogue about issue of race, and how these discussions fosters racial literacy. From their

findings the authors conclude that fostering racial literacy is an interactive process. In this study, students placed in small groups were noted to support one another's racial literacy practices by 1) listening to, and acknowledging peoples' different experiences, 2) problem solving within the community, and 3) creating opportunities to think and discuss race.

These works, and others based in K-12 settings (Smith, 2014; Skerrett, 2011; Howard, 2013) tend to focus on white students and white teachers in their discussion of racial literacy. There are exceptions, however, (Epstein & Conra, 2015; Stevenson, 2014; Twine, 2010) that examine racial literacy as it relates to people of color. While unrelated to education, Twine's 2010 publication is an example. Twine's ethnographic, longitudinal study of 40 multiracial families in Great Britain took place throughout a decade. Her research informs her definition of racial literacy, one that showcases the intersectionalities of race with other identity markers. She posits that racial literacy includes the following components:

- 1) The definition of racism as a contemporary problem rather than a historical legacy.
- 2) An understanding of the ways that experiences of racism and racialization are mediated by class, gender inequality, and heterosexuality;
- 3) a recognition of the cultural and symbolic value of whiteness;
- 4) an understanding that racial identities are learned and an outcome of social practices;
- 5) the possession of a racial grammar and vocabulary to discuss race, racism, and antiracism and
- 6) the ability to interpret racial codes and racialized practices. (Twine, 2010, p. 92).

In her book she showcases her data to illustrate (parent) participants' racial literacy in action as they cope with racism and teach their multiracial children to do the same. In doing so, she also addressed a gap in sociological literature, highlighting how white



women “acquire forms of consciousness that enable them to embrace an antiracist white identity to identify strongly with blacks” (p. 92).

Returning to the educational literature, Epstein and Conra (2015) shift their focus away from whites, and examine how urban high school teachers fostered the racial literacy practices of their students of color. Through coding of classroom observations and interviews conducted with three focal teachers of color throughout the academic year, the authors found that these New York City humanities teachers challenged the perspectives held by low-income students of color regarding race and racism, impacting these students’ racial literacy practices as well as their self-perceptions.

### **Summary**

Examining racial literacy in education research identifies various trends. To begin, scholars commonly view racial literacy development as an ongoing practice and process. Given this, certain scholars suggest a continuing examination of peoples’ racial literacy throughout their lifespan so as to identify how one’s racial literacy practices evolve. Many believe racial literacy is socially constructed. As such, numerous scholars combine observational data with critical discourse analysis in effort to gauge how interactions (specifically discursive exchanges) shape individual racial literacy practices. Additionally the literature displays the varying definitions of this construct within the field. Whereas some scholars limit their definition of racial literacy as an ability to identify and analyze the role that racism plays in producing/sustaining racial inequities, others emphasize *action* as a fundamental component of racial literacy. Furthermore, there is a variance in the population that scholars focus on in their research. Some scholars choose to prioritize how white participants operationalize racial literacy,

whereas others examine racial literacy practices among people of color. On a whole, the education literature surrounding racial literacy is situated in in-school contexts.

For multiple reasons, racial literacy is a construct I draw upon in this dissertation. To begin, racial literacy is shown to have transformative potential, given its focus on change through knowledge *and* action. Additionally, racial literacy emphasizes an individual's role in maintaining systemic racism, rather than dismissing individuals as powerless in the larger system; a stance that is in itself a way of maintaining the status quo. Winans (2010), for example, describes how this has happened with the construct of colorblindness. We accept racism by noting "oh they're just colorblind" code for "they don't know any better", instead of confronting the perpetuator of colorblindness, and holding them accountable by way of further education and racial literacy development. Bonilla-Silva (2003); and Rodriguez (2008) have discussed this further in their description of *color-blind racism*. Racial literacy counters this *laissez faire* approach by highlighting each actor's role, thus placing the onus on individuals to take ownership and develop and practice a sense of racial literacy.

While many who examine racial literacy look at the teaching and learning process of this construct, I utilize Mosley and Rogers' focus on evidence of racial literacy in discourse. Like them, I look at white people and people of color, to examine how they take up and perform whiteness. However, apart from the scholars featured here, I extend the conversation beyond school walls to look at how community members perform racial literacy, and the relationship between policy formation and/or practice.

Applying the construct of racial literacy in research addresses a gap in education reform literature. It shifts the attitude from a passive, "here's the problem" outlook, and

instead insinuates an individual responsibility to enact and practice racial literacy. As scholars have highlighted, (Castagno, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015) it is often the level of unawareness about the effects of one's actions and discourse that perpetuate the systemic racism that sustains the racial inequities. Racial literacy holds potential to shift our gaze from those who experience the inequities, towards those who sustain them, and thus suggests that the existing racial inequities might be altered through explicit education and practice of racial literacy. (For more information about racial literacy development as an ongoing, social process, please see Appendix A).

To summarize, because race and racism are socially constructed, it would seem to make sense that an improvement in society's collective racial literacy might serve to identify, admit to, and resist the systems in place that result in racial inequities. As whiteness is a fundamental component that upholds racism, the conversation must address those people who embody these characteristics (whites, but also people of color (Castagno, 2014). As Singleton and Linton (2006) describe, "an emerging consciousness surrounding Whiteness is critical to building racial equity...by acknowledging and understanding Whiteness, White people begin to see the way in which their culture subordinates other cultures. With consciousness comes action, and with action comes transformation" (p. 204).

## **Part II: Theoretical Framework**

Having provided an overview of the literature related to the dissertation's first question, this chapter continues with an explanation of critical race theory (CRT), the theoretical lens I draw on to design the study, and collect and analyze its data. The literature featured in Part II helps to situate the dissertation's second question: *what are*

*the affordances of and constraints to researcher's and participants' roles and voices when they use collaborative practices of analysis in qualitative research?* After explaining CRT and its tenets, I examine scholars' use of CRT in education-related research, in particular their use of counterstorytelling. This discussion continues in chapter VI where I discuss the responses to the above question. Part II concludes with a discussion of the potential implications *repurposing* and *expanding* counterstorytelling could have in the field, particularly as they relate to humanizing (Paris and Winn, 2014) and decolonizing (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) qualitative research practices, and critical race *praxis* (Yamamoto, 1999; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

### **Critical Race Theory**

Derived out of critical legal studies and radical feminism, critical race theory (CRT) was first developed in the 1970s in the field of law by a group of concerned legal scholars and activists. Wanting to maintain the momentum of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, they aimed to develop new theories that were necessary to combat the “subtler” forms of racism that were becoming normalized (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012, p. 4). The use of CRT, therefore, is not only a lens to identify, but to *transform* the relationship between race, racism and power (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Within the field of education, Ladson-Billings (2000) and Tate (1999) first introduced CRT, highlighting the need for scholars to theorize race in order to more effectively address racial disparities in education.

Critical race theory subscribes to numerous tenets. The first is an understanding that racism is an omni-present structure in the United States. People of color suffer the effects of racism daily, while whites benefit from it both psychically and materially.

Dominant discourse or “grand narratives” such as false conceptions of equality, colorblindness, and meritocracy sustain racism’s existence through a lack of acknowledgement. Another relevant tenet of CRT is that race and racism are socially constructed. Race is not a biological entity, but rather a result of social thought, discourse and relations. Therefore, a particular group’s status is fluid, and each may be redefined and possess more or less power at any particular moment in history. Equally important to note is CRT’s acknowledgement that identity is multi-dimensional- a white man might be a gay, single father; an African-American may also be Jewish and upper class. “Everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (Delgado and Stefanie, 2012, p. 10). Thus, while CRT prioritizes the examination and analysis of race, it does not discount other influencing factors such as class or gender. As Parker (1998) notes: “the critical centering of race (together with social class, gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of difference) at the locations where the research is conducted and discussions are held can serve as a major link between fully understanding the historical vestiges of discrimination and the present-day racial manifestations of that discrimination” (Parker, 1998, p. 46). Finally, and perhaps most important to the work herein, is CRT’s positioning of people of color. Critical race theory emphasizes and prioritizes the voices of people of color through counterstorytelling— “a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told... a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). Positioning participants of color and providing them with a platform to share their stories allows researchers to capture their

perspectives and assessments of grand narratives that serve to sustain the status quo, perhaps problematizing or falsifying the status quo.

### **CRT in the Literature**

While Lynn & Parker (2006), and more recently Ledesma and Calderón (2015), provide a thematic overview regarding the use of CRT in education, I use this section to highlight methodological trends exhibited by scholars who align with a critical race theoretical framework. A common application of critical race theory is its use as a lens to examine the experiences of people of color in academic settings (Stovall, 2013; Chapman, 2013; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Howard, 2008). I describe how various scholars have applied CRT to examine both the experiences of people of color in urban settings, and also show how various scholars have extended this to suburban, racially mixed schools.

### **Race in K-12 Schools**

Chapman (2013) examines how students of color in a majority white suburban school negotiate their environment. Using a critical race theoretical framework facilitates in shifting her focus from students' of color reactions to racism, to focusing on the institutional factors that sustain the racism and oppression the students experience. The problem is not the students, but rather various school practices such as tracking, curriculum, student surveillance and classroom conduct (see Cooks & Simpson, for example). The author emphasizes CRT's colorblindness and counterstorytelling tenets to show how the school climate actually contradicts the colorblind stance it upholds. Through 22 focus groups with a total of 97 students of color (14-19 years old) Chapman highlights the real examples of how schools racializes the students of color. The students

are from six different schools and four predominantly white mid-western suburban districts.

Howard (2008) uses CRT's counterstorytelling as a direct method to examine African American males' k-12 academic experiences. Although he conducts interviews with over 200 middle and high school students, the aim of his 2008 article is to show, by drawing on the boys' stories, how the experiences of black males differ in different school settings. As such he showcases five men who attended urban, primarily low-income schools (made up of African American and Latino students for the most part) and five who attended a more racially mixed school in suburban communities (predominantly white and middle class). Howard explains the overlapping themes by showcasing the participants' words directly. Including excerpts from their responses is a powerful means to not only display their thoughts, but to let the males define their own reality in their own terms. Perhaps most influential is the ability these stories have to highlight the absurdity of the common narratives assigned to these men.

Howard and Reynolds (2008) shift their focus toward a different population- that of African American parents in middle-class schools. The authors draw on CRT as their framework so as to best examine the intersection of race and class as they analyze the role of parent involvement in the education of middle-class African American students. Drawing from interviews with 6 parents, and 3 focus groups with 10 parents in each, they applied a critical race theoretical framework because of its counterstorytelling element. Their analysis reflects the authors' commitment to emphasize the parents' voices, as their words are the basis for the authors' claims.

Dyrness (2007) also focuses on parents. She uses a critical race theoretical lens to examine the safe space created by her Latina mother participants. The group members themselves and the fashion in which the meeting agenda was structured, combined with the safety provided in the homes where they met, allowed the women to discuss freely their struggles and experiences in the school spaces. They were allowed the opportunity in their meetings to name one's own reality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In this sense, Dyrness noted the Madres Unidas served as a site of resistance in that it opened up space for counterstorytelling.

### **Higher Education**

Griffin, Ward, and Phillips (2013) use counterstorytelling in a similar fashion to shed light on African American males' experience in academia. Their focus differs from Howard (2008) and Chapman (2013) in that they explore black male experiences who serve as professors at a predominately white institution. In effort to explore the absence of black male faculty in higher education, the authors create a composite story based on interviews from 11 men.

In combination with critical race feminism, Evans-Winters & Hoff (2011) use a CRT framework to explore how and why their white pre-service teachers are reluctant to learn about, and deconstruct systems of racial oppression. Drawing on CRT's tenet that race and racism are integral factors in American society, and in particular the teacher education program in which they both serve as professors, the authors of color explore how racism is manifested through classroom discourse and by the institution at large. Specifically the authors examine two students' narrative responses on the end-of-semester professor evaluation forms. Examining the two forms, the professors aim to



contextualize the students' evaluative comments from a raced and gendered perspective. Through this act, the authors expose the racist claims and micro aggressions in the comments, and in doing so, claim their counterstory. The authors' analysis of the comments shows teacher education programs, and academic spaces in general "continue to be hostile and contested sites" (Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011, p. 467) disguised by the grand narrative and of "white youth innocence" (p. 467).

Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano (2000, 2009) use CRT to examine Latinx peoples' experiences with, and responses to microaggressions at three universities. Their choice to apply CRT is due to its explicit focus on how "race shapes university structures, practices, and discourses from the perspectives of those injured by and fighting against institutional racism" (663). Yosso et al. conduct semi-structured interviews during 8 focus groups (3-6 students in each) with a total of 37 Latinx participants. There is one of few articles discussed here that uses CRT without using counterstorytelling.

### **Critical Race Theory and Ethnographic Approaches**

Another common theme of critical race theory application is in ethnographic work that examines racial inequity and cultures of resistance (Duncan, 2005; Patel, 2013; Dyrness, 2011, 2007, Vaught, 2011). O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller (2007) emphasize the reasoning and benefits of using the two together. Because ethnography is aligned to CRT's notion that racism is socially constructed, pairing CRT with an ethnographic methodological approach is appropriate given the latter's ability to explore the cultural components that sustain racism. Vaught's work (2011) is a clear example of this, as she uses a critical race ethnographic approach which weaves CRT into the ethnography. She distinguishes between a critical ethnography and a critical race ethnography describing

the latter as fundamentally contributing to the study of race and racism. In this spirit, her work is highly theoretical, as she draws on at least one of CRT's tenets in each of her chapters to analyze how people are raced and race one another within the institutional structures of her urban high school site. She examines both the macro (district policies and practices) and micro (classroom) levels to uncover the structural nature of racism. Patel (2013) provides another example of critical race ethnography. Drawing on policy analysis and critical race ethnography Patel examines how immigrant youth are positioned in schools and how schools serve to extend the political economy.

### **The Role of CRT in the Dissertation, and Beyond**

*We're segregated by class and race. I guess for poorer people- a lot of us are here because of the housing subsidies that allow us to be part of this community. So that's been helpful to get communities of color who belong to lower socioeconomic to remain to be part of our school system (Thalia, interview, 1-10-16)*

Thalia's quote above shows the intersectionality between race and class- one of numerous identity characteristics including sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, etc. with which race might intersect. While I acknowledge this intersectionality among the participants in my study, my analysis focuses on race.

Because it positions racism as a structural entity, CRT is an appropriate lens to explore how Cartfield community members' discourse and action maintain and/or disrupt the power structures that sustain racial inequities. While I acknowledge that issues of class, gender and additional forms of discrimination exist, I choose to foreground race in my analysis by drawing on CRT. The choice to prioritize race is in direct response to the patterns I noted throughout my role as a participant observer. Evidence of post-racial and colorblind ideologies from Cartfield community members' actions and discourse

constituted the use of critical race theory as an appropriate lens to examine how these behaviors perpetuate the structural racism that exists in the district. Rooted in social justice, the use of CRT as a theoretical framework is, in itself, also an activist's response: critical race theory sheds light on the words, actions, and sentiments that sustain the racial inequities in the district so that these findings can dance off these pages and find a new platform where they will be heard and seen by various audiences.

### **Limitations of Critical Race Theory**

#### **Counterstorytelling: Legitimate Research?**

Throughout its relatively short period of existence, critical race theory has been subjected to numerous criticisms. As evidenced in the literature featured, and elsewhere (Delgado, 2013; González, 1999; Hermes, 1999; Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Lynn 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c), counterstorytelling is a common method associated with critical race theory. As previously defined, counterstorytelling is “a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told... a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). As described here, counterstorytelling serves to 1) uncover a different perspective, and highlight it as a reality and 2) use these stories to juxtapose and thus problematize the grand narratives created and sustained by those who hold power. In addition to these benefits, stories have the potential to indicate the factors that prevent social change from occurring (Tillman, 2002). And while it holds great potential, storytelling does not go without criticism. This methodological tool is commonly seen as lacking analytical rigor and objectivity. It is criticized for the fact that it does not allow

opportunities to verify with the “victims” the accuracy of their accounts (Farber & Sherry, 1997; Posner, 1997, 2000; Kennedy, 1995).

Like many scholars (Urrieta & Villenas, 2013; Wane, 2008, Parker & Lynn, 2002) Huber (2009), a Latinx critical race theorist, indirectly speaks to this critique as she examines the effectiveness of *testimonio* (a method traditionally associated with Latina feminist theory that prioritizes the experiences of Latinx participants) as a method to access her participants’ experiences in a university setting. In sharing an anecdote about how one of Huber’s colleagues frowned upon her data set which consisted of 40 *testimonios* and two focus groups with her 20 women participants of Mexican origin, Huber points to *apartheid of knowledge* in academia: “Western epistemologies that maintain white superiority through the production of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal & Vollalpando, 2002, p. 640). *Apartheid* highlights the racial divide between dominant Eurocentric epistemologies and other approaches, which results in “legitimate” and “illegitimate” forms of knowledge (for legitimation of knowledge and power see Córdova, 1998; Foucault, 1980; Scheurich and Young, 1997; McLaren and Pinkney-Pastrana, 2000, as cited by Huber, 2009). White supremacist ideologies sustain epistemological racism and the apartheid of knowledge in academia. (Huber, 2009, p 641) The process of knowledge production, in itself, and the epistemological stance and methods we apply can serve to either showcase or silence our participants of color.

O’Connor, Lewis and Mueller (2007) demonstrate how this *apartheid* construct plays out in the field. In synthesizing 40 years of education research to look at how researchers have conceptualized race, they noted that scholars treated race as a “culture” and as a “variable”. The authors concluded that treating race in these fashions “reifies

race as a stable and objective category and links it deterministically to culture” (p. 542). The authors show how the field of education has historically contributed to the apartheid of knowledge, reinstituting again and again that racism is on the onus of people of color, rather than analyzing the institutional production of racism. Critical race theory assists to develop the epistemological shift for which these authors advocate, as it allows us to view race as socially constructed, rather than a characteristic people of color possess.

### **Critical Race Praxis**

Alluding to the idea of critical race *praxis*, Su (2005) suggests an additional critique, noting that while critical race theory helps to identify institutional racism, it does not offer solutions. Likewise, Howard (2008) advocates that the field move beyond ideology, towards implementing useful strategies that might impact the everyday lives of students of color (p. 977). This section discusses how critical race theory has begun to reach a level of praxis- the “wedding of reflection & action to foster positive social change...in which individuals engage in problematizing what is (the status quo) from an agentive position and seek to change it in their own situations, in their own lifeworlds” (Souto-Manning, 2014b, p. 202).

Yamamoto (1999) in the legal context, and Lynn and Parker (2006) more currently in an education context, suggest we take critical race *theory* further, and work towards achieving critical race *praxis*. In 2004, Ladson-Billings noted how curriculum, instruction and assessment would all benefit from a CRT analysis. In his 2008 publication Howard added standardized testing and school discipline to this list. Since then, CRT has moved in a direction that is influencing K-12 classroom pedagogy, and scholars (Asimeng-Boahene, 2010; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, Chapman, 2007) have examined

critical race pedagogy's potential to empower students of color and break down institutional ideologies such as colorblindness, meritocracy and post-racialism.

While CRT has influenced a pedagogical shift, few scholars have strived to achieve critical race *praxis* in their education-related *research* practices. Antwi Akom is an exception. In his 2011 article he introduces the construct of Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR)- a methodology that aims to break down the divide between research participants and the researcher. It draws on critical race theory; participatory action research; Critical Africentricity and feminist scholarship, and prioritizes community capacity building, participants' voices, local knowledge, and action. The author explores how BEAR might serve as a theoretical, methodological and pedagogical tool to work towards social justice as it explores and addresses racism, classism and sexism (p. 114). Akom argues that BEAR exposes the shortcomings of Chicago school ethnography and critical ethnography, in particular the lack of collaboration between the researcher and their communities in producing knowledge. Akom notes that BEAR provides "participants with opportunities for meaningful engagement in problem identification, analysis planning, civic engagement and community-led evaluation...[teaching] communities to 'read the world' and develop skills, which can contribute to a sense of mastery, power and control over their environment" (p. 120). Informed by CRT, BEAR is similar to participatory action research, but more appropriate for examining race-related issues.

Like Akom, Stovall (2013) also displays a level of praxis in his research, in part because of his positionality as a researcher. He, like Akom, strives to do research *with* and not *on* people of color. As a scholar of color himself, the counterstories that he shares

are all the more powerful because he is able to speak alongside his participants, thus using his voice as a researcher to reflect his participants' perspectives. Stovall notes:

CRT locates the stories of people of color in the U.S. and larger world as historically relevant and valid...Through our subjectivity, we are able to acknowledge and validate the myriad of experiences and perspectives. Ours is not the only viewpoint, but a perspective that is often excluded. Due to these omissions, it is critical for the activist/scholar to intentionally engage the political exercise of claiming our space to tell our story (Stovall, 2013, p. 564).

Here, through use of the possessive pronoun "ours", Stovall intentionally centers the perspective of people of color, a fundamental tenet of CRT. Drawing on Freire (1969), Stovall (2013) suggests that CRT in education already possesses characteristics of praxis in that it supports “action and reflection in the world in order to change it” (p. 564). Stovall believes that the very act of people of color voicing their stories communicates their challenges, and thus “encourages” to address the issues racism creates. But what happens when a white researcher’s voice is *not* reflected in the counterstories? And how does this impact what happens between the collection of the counterstories, and the analysis of them? These, though fairly specific considerations for critical race theorists, reflect larger ethical considerations in the field.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In response to a long tradition of controversial, if not exploitative, experimental and empirical research of white scholars on people of color, Tuhiwai Smith (2012) discusses the marginalizing aspects of whites studying non-whites. Pillow (2003) posits that only people belonging to a particular social group should research that group, as they have shared experiences of oppression. Gunaratnam (2003) argues the opposite, stating that this assumes a sense of monoculturality in race, and risks representation of the

particular group of people; she reminds us the importance of not treating the words of a few participants of color as “truth”. Other scholars (e.g. Archer, 2003; Weiler, 2001; Knowles, 2003) have spoken specifically about white researchers researching race. Weiler (2001) argues that leaving the study of race and racism to people of color might end up further marginalizing them in that it makes racism a people of color problem. Knowles (2003) agrees, positing that it is the responsibility of privileged groups to research this topic, given these groups are part of the systemic racism. Taken together, these scholars show us the magnitude of ethical considerations of whites conducting research about racism.

Certain white scholars who examine race reflect on their whiteness in the research process. Drawing from a larger study to explore the ways in which racial structures impact the interview experience both for her and her participants of color, Chadderton (2011) exposes her own reflexivity as a white researcher. This reflection allows her to realize she prioritizes her white voice, and not her participants of color. Her larger study uses ethnographic methods to explore how two urban schools in Northern Great Britain address issues of racism. In examining her role as a white researcher in perpetuating white supremacy in the research process, she realized that the interview questions she asked her participants of color racially positioned them. Because she had failed to recognize the manner in which structures of white supremacy would impact the interview, she further perpetuated white supremacy. Gordon (2005) also shows evidence of reflection. She concludes that she abused her white privilege as a result of being colorblind in her research. She shares three vignettes from her ethnographic research to demonstrate the tactics she uses to avoid race talk during her interviews. She argues that



researchers must consider the role of whiteness in the research process. Avoiding to do so perpetuates white supremacy.

While I commend scholars' act of confronting their white positionality, and believe reflection and awareness is a necessary first step, I'd like to take the sentiment further and contemplate what white researchers can do to *address* their whiteness in race-related research. How do white researchers accurately represent the voices of those we wish to most represent in our socially just oriented research?

Rymes, Souto-Manning and Brown (2005) state that in order to truly engage in critical research, we must take our "moral compasses" into consideration. "The challenge is to formulate a social theory leading to research and praxis that can accommodate both the power of the discursive social field and the moral impulse to take a stand" (Rymes, Souto-Manning and Brown (2005). On the other hand, Lather (2007), like many post-structural theorists, argued it is naïve to think researchers can represent participants' voices, considering that research is a process in which the researcher dominates the data collection, analysis and interpretation, and presentation of the data. She calls this "the fiction of restoring lost voices" (p. 38). Even using a method such as counterstorytelling does not guarantee white researchers won't misinterpret or misrepresent our participants of color. In fact, Ladson-Billing (2005b) warns the use of counterstorytelling is dangerous if it is not done in a critical fashion. "I sometimes worry that scholars who are attracted to CRT focus on storytelling to the exclusion of the central ideas such stories purport to illustrate" (Ladson-Billings, 2005b, p. 117).

In chapter VI of this dissertation I explore the use of counterstorytelling as a data *analysis* tool in CRT-oriented research. I argue that extending its use beyond the

*collection* phase not only shows promise of advancing our journey towards critical race *praxis*, but addresses many of the ethical considerations common to qualitative inquiry, particularly those related to white researchers' examination of race-related issues. In doing so, I address my second research question: *what are the affordances of and constraints to researcher's and participants' roles and voices when they use collaborative practices of analysis in qualitative research?*

### **Chapter Summary and Discussion**

Drawing on the literature from the past 15 years this chapter has provided an overview of scholars' examinations of racial inequity in and around various school settings. Part I of the chapter discusses the literature surrounding school reform, community organizing, and issues of inequity in education. This discussion identifies a significant gap regarding where the field focuses its attention; a gap that while unintentional, insinuates that primarily urban districts- code for *underresourced*- fall victim to racial inequity. Likewise, as noted, the literature takes a passive approach in its discussion of racial inequities. By limiting the discussion to uncovering and identifying existing racial inequities, and focusing on participants who experience them firsthand, scholars divert their attention away from those who are part of the problem, the *perpetuators*, as I label them. I draw on the construct of racial literacy in my research in a highly resourced, high-performing school district to look at how racial inequities are sustained in such environments.

Part II of this chapter focused on critical race theory (CRT), the theoretical framework I draw on to design this study, and collect and analyze the data. I described CRT's fundamental tenets, paying particular attention to the construct of

counterstorytelling. I examined scholars' use of CRT in the research, which led to my reconceptualization of counterstorytelling as a data *analysis* tool. This discussion addresses important considerations including white researcher's positionality in race-related research, and critical race *praxis* (Yamamoto, 1999; Lynn & Parker, 2006). As this section of the chapter shows, the process of examining issues of racial inequity is equally important as the findings. My dissertation's second question builds on the body of literature that takes up issues of representation in education research. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes "methodological debates"- the broader politics, and the intentional goals of the research, and their impact on oppressed populations. If research intends to transform the educational outcomes of oppressed populations, research participants must increasingly serve as co-researchers. My dissertation introduces and evaluates an approach that aims to do just this (Chapter VI). The next chapter describes in greater detail the methods I apply to examine my research questions.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

My dissertation addresses two questions. The first looks at the outside-of-school factors that sustain racial inequity in a high-performing school district. Specifically, I examine the role of community members, including parents, administrators and school committee members. Using racial literacy as a lens, I examine how community members' discourse and actions operationalize racial literacy to explore how this sustains or resists the existing racial inequities. The second question pertains to the research methods I use in addressing the dissertation's topic and speaks to the affordances and constraints of research participant collaborative practices of analysis for the roles and voice of the researcher and participants in qualitative research. This second question builds on the body of literature that takes up issues of representation in education research by examining *counterstorytelling* and extending its use to the data analysis process. This chapter describes the research design in place to examine these two questions. Prior to this description, however, I discuss my positionality and my place in this research; two important considerations given the inextricable link between researcher identity and ethnographic research. This then leads into a reflection about the ethical considerations of conducting this research.

#### **Role of the Researcher**

There is no such thing as bias-free research. Researchers approach their studies equipped with a toolbox full of prior knowledge, perspectives, identities and experiences that informs all stages of the research- from the development of the questions, the research design and data collection, to the analysis, interpretation of the findings, and decisions about what to do with the learned information. Giampapa (2011) highlights

this aspect when she notes, “the process of being and becoming a researcher started well before I entered ‘the field’” (p. 137). Likewise, in an essay that originated as her presidential address to the Council of Anthropology and Education, Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (2017) notes “our childhood experiences shape our work... and we may gain new insights into the things we study by considering the earliest inspirations for our inquiries. As anthropologists of our own lives, we built our own “emic” perspectives, and then modify them through experiences that make our familiar lives strange” (p. 211). I begin this chapter with my personal history to show the path I have traveled that has brought me to this dissertation research. My history reveals the tools in my own toolbox and unveils my life experiences that have nurtured my critical perspective; a perspective reflected in my ethnographic examination of racial inequity in a high-performing school district.

### **Positionality: Lessons from a Crowded *Matatu***

The start of this journey began twenty years ago, at age 17, when I participated in a ten-week student exchange program between an all-girls school based outside of Nairobi, and my private high school in Massachusetts. While travelers’ lasting impressions of Kenya are often of postcard-quality scenes from the Serengeti, mine is quite different, yet fundamental to developing the critical perspective that I bring to my research. Perhaps due to my naiveté at that age, the image that lingers from my ten weeks in Kenya was that from an over-packed *matatu* weaving through Nairobi’s streets: children with jars of shoe glue held to their noses. These children were not much younger than me, yet we were separated by the social injustices that sustain empty bellies and shanty towns.

This crowded *matatu* ride was the pin that popped the bubble of grand narratives my parents, teachers, and society had constructed around me. At the cost of the glue-sniffing children, I quickly learned that my success was not attributed to hard work alone, but rather the privileges I had been born into. From that point on, I continued to question the “truths” I was told- a stance I maintain as an educational researcher, and in conducting my dissertation research.

I have fostered this critical perspective over time, and applied it throughout my career. Though unaware of the term “critical pedagogy” at the time, my French-teaching practice exhibited its characteristics. My act of rewriting Eurocentric French curriculum, and teaching my students to question the role of the French language in post-colonial West Africa, was my way of using French-teaching as a medium to cultivate critical minds.

As a white Peace Corps volunteer in a post-colonial country, I became hyper-reflective of the “knowledge holder” status my Malian colleagues assigned me. For two years I was reminded daily of the status associated with my skin color by children who yelled *toubab* as I walked down the street. This word, used throughout West Africa, is one that refers to white Europeans. It is from the Arabic word *toubib*, meaning doctor, or from the Wolof verb *tuub*, meaning “to convert<sup>4</sup>”. White, European doctors and missionaries made their way to West Africa during colonial times, and *toubab* is the constant reminder of this. My time in Mali provoked my interest in, and act of taking up issues of decolonizing methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) in my practice. It shaped the participatory approach in my research practice, and I prioritize approaches and methods

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/toubib/78619>

that foreground the participants. While Peace Corps necessitates its own critical analysis which is beyond the scope of the chapter, noteworthy is the fact that my Peace Corps experience is the impetus for taking up the examination of how research methods impact traditional researcher/participant roles.

Lessons like those I learned in a crowded *matatu* are tucked away in the invisible toolbox I take with me as I approach my research. These lessons- many learnt as a white woman in an international context- have helped me better understand my whiteness, and the privilege tied to my skin color. I feel better equipped to draw attention to such privilege, and in doing so, uncover the racism that exists in my research context. Noteworthy is the fact that the same white skin from which I benefit, also sets me up to be “a permanent outsider” (Ladson-Billings, 2016, p. 28) among my white peers in my research context. Ladson-Billings asserts that taking “bold and sometimes unpopular positions” (*ibid*) is a requirement when using critical race theory as a framework for educational equity. I felt this tension as I invited, and was denied the opportunity to interview particular participants whose views are different from mine.

The pages and chapters that follow aim to embrace a level of transparency and reflexivity regarding how my lived experiences influence my interpretation of the data. Reflecting on my own positionality as a white researcher examining racial inequity in a US context is a thread I weave throughout these pages. I know that someone with different toolkit contents will construct a different story- such is the nature of research and the role of the researcher in it. I believe it my responsibility to extract the stories from my background that cause me to interpret the data the way I do, and make the claims I make. I must call myself into question, just as our society might question the validity of

the claims made by my peers' of color. As such, I begin by describing my place in this research.

### **Arrival to this Research**

As will be discussed in chapter four, we, like many in town, decided to move to Cartfield due to the combination of the strong schools reputation Cartfield upheld, as well as the prominent number of people of color. While I had observed and gotten tours in other local towns, it was the racial diversity that provoked my husband and me to buy a house in Cartfield. We had only lived in town for four months when I heard, and read in local newspapers about a high school teacher of color who had been subjected to racial attacks. Curious to hear more about what had happened, and explore the district's response, I began to attend school committee meetings. For a while, I observed from the outskirts as the mother of a child who would soon attend the district pre-school. But as time went on, I began to see a discrepancy between the district's social justice oriented mission statement and the administration's practices. My participation in various community events increased; I attended vigils and rallies in support of the high school teacher, Diane Sherry, and later, I joined and became an active participant in the various community organizations that were created or rekindled in response to the testimony Diane Sherry presented before the Cartfield Regional School Committee on March 25, 2014.

Through my involvement in, and attendance at various group meetings, I began to note a difference between events I attended and how the media was portraying them. For example, the headline assigned to a peaceful candlelight vigil in support of Diane Sherry read "Fifty brave cold for [Sherry] protest" (*Cartfield Times*, 11-21-14). Additionally, the



level of support for Ms. Sherry from the district administration decreased as time went on. Promises from the mouths of the district administrators lost validity as time progressed, and little action was taken to support Ms. Sherry. The Cartfield High School Principal noted in a memo to the high school staff, “Our immediate charge is to rally around Diane, she is ours. She needs to know this now more than ever” (*Chronicle Herald*, March 22, 2014). As months went by this initial outpouring of support from the administrators eventually turned into a battle between the Cartfield District and Diane Sherry.

I arrived at this research in an organic fashion, provoked by a sincere curiosity about how a district that claims its mission is “the academic achievement of every student’s learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism”, would respond. Yet as the limited literature that examines racial inequities in a *high-performing* district like Cartfield reflects, well-intended policies (like Cartfield’s mission statement) often cause more harm than good for those people they are attempting to most impact (Castagno, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). My dissertation builds on this body of literature by moving *outside* of school and examines the role that community members play in sustaining *in-school* inequities.

### **Ethical Considerations**

#### **Proximity to the Research**

One evening over dinner at my home, a research participant asked me if I felt I was “too close” to the research. I responded that the role of bias in conducting qualitative research- especially ethnographic research where one is fully immersed as a participant observer- is an inevitable component. I explained to her that I am well aware of the bias I

maintain, and thus need to continuously reflect on how this bias impacts my data collection and analysis processes (fieldnotes, October 27, 2015). One aspect that certainly biases my interpretation of the data is the close relationship I have with people of color, and my role as an ally.

### **Ally Status**

Being an ally cannot be a self-declared title, but must be a status assigned to us by the people we seek to support through our work and commitment. Likewise, as an ally, I know my work is ongoing and that I must continue to learn and seek new knowledge in order to continue to uphold my status. Through my ongoing involvement, and through my actions, I have become to be seen as an ally to the people of color in the Cartfield community.

Throughout this journey many people of color have acknowledged my ongoing commitment to the various community groups in which I have been involved. These statements of gratitude confirm for me that many people of color in my community value my involvement. The trust I have developed with community members of color has inevitably facilitated this research. Another anecdote further illustrates my role as an ally in this research.

In October 2015 I received an invitation in an email to attend an awards dinner to celebrate the teacher recipient (the particular award is designated for a teacher of color in the district). While I wanted to attend, I was not ready to commit to the price of the dinner, and thus regretfully declined the invitation, due to the cost of the ticket. A day later I received an email stating that I could attend by way of a donated ticket should I choose. In his email, Robert wrote:

Katie,

Some people have donated tickets for the award dinner on Sunday night. I've been able to arrange for you to have one of those tickets. I think your commitment to equity in our schools makes you one of the people we'd really like to have at the dinner. Can you be there, if we provide a free ticket? Please say "yes" if you possibly can.  
Best, Robert (Email from Robert November 3, 2015)

To be acknowledged by Robert, who I describe further in this paper, was reassuring. He is someone who is very committed to dismantling racism efforts, so for him to identify me as someone who is “committed to equity” was validating, especially as I frequently reflected on my own intentions in this work, wanting to make sure I wasn’t using the community for purposes of research alone.

My dual role as a parent-activist (and an overt ally to people of color), and a researcher added a level of complexity to this work. It required me to take on a different perspective as I looked at my study’s context. As a researcher I needed to make a concerted effort to involve (e.g. interview) those who could challenge my perspective- a perspective that is far from conservative around the issues I examine herein. When reaching out to those who shared different views than me, I realized my own limitations. And while I invited various school committee members to interview, for example, a few declined the invitation, perhaps a reflection on how I openly position myself in the community. Whatever the cause, their lack of participation in the study is a limitation.

### **Research for What Purpose?**

I often reflect on what drives my involvement in these endeavors. Race and issues of racism were never topics about which I considered having much knowledge, nevermind expertise. In fact, I learned about my white privilege relatively late into my life, at age 19, in a college sociology class. Yet since becoming a parent in 2011 my

(white) partner and I have worked to educate ourselves about how to discuss race and racism with our pre-school aged son. We have attended parent workshops, read and discussed books such as Debby Irving's *Waking Up White*, researched children's books that broach this topic, and have begun to define race and racial inequity with our son using simple terms. Reflective of many white people, our own parents did not discuss race or whiteness with us, and thus we lack a model when it comes to building our son's white privilege awareness.

Thus, my original desire to explore the district's response to Diane Sherry's situation was for selfish reasons; I wish to send my son to a school where his anti-racist identity will be further developed, not challenged. Yet as the information in this dissertation reveals, this is not always the case, even in a high-performing, racially diverse district with a social justice-oriented mission statement. Noteworthy, and what I realized during the data collection phase of the dissertation, is that my ability to sustain my parent-activist role is facilitated by my low-risk position. I do not experience a level of fear, or intimidation that others might feel who have older, college-bound students. This theme was captured during a focus group with participants who do advocacy work in the district. Participants noted that their work is facilitated by the fact that they no longer have children enrolled in the district schools, so there is minimal risk involved.

Sarah: I don't have kids in the school. Well you still have grandkids (*talking to Amelia*), but at least for some of us we're not afraid of them, and I think they're used to having people be afraid of them. So what are they gonna do to me, fire me? The difference is we're not intimidated by them, I think that's our strength.

Deb: And we're not nervous about them getting in the way of our kids' chances of going to Wellesley or anything like that. (stated with sarcasm)

Important to note, and an aspect that I would be remiss not to acknowledge is that my work as a white parent/activist/researcher/educator, who addresses issues of race and racism, is a choice. I have a *choice* because of my white privilege, and can choose to disengage when the work becomes too challenging, unlike many people of color who cannot. My very act of asking “what drives my involvement” comes from a place of privilege. It is not something I must do, like those friends of color who have no choice other than to address the injustices they experience daily. I had a choice of whether or not I got involved, and I can choose whether or not I stay involved. This is my white privilege at work; I can shy away from these issues anytime I find the efforts to be too inconvenient, too uncomfortable, too risky. My work as a parent activist is often draining given the often intangible results we see from our efforts. The meetings pull me from my young family multiple times each week. And while originally the reason I stayed involved was the same reason I had gotten involved to begin with- to ensure that the school system my son attends aligns and exhibits anti-racist practices, these reasons have since shifted.

As the activist work progressed, and my relationships with people of color deepened, so did my understanding of my role in the struggle. I have come to understand that *not addressing* the racism my peers of color experience *is racist*. Coming to this understanding was the result of months of self-exploration, attendance at workshops geared towards whites, and reading a plethora of literature. Likewise it is the result of the relationships I have formed and deepened with people of color. Doing this work is now about responsibility. It is my responsibility as a white woman, a white parent activist, a white researcher, to address issues of racial inequity. Doing otherwise would be an abuse

of my white privilege; an act of white supremacy. Thus, the contents of this dissertation reaches beyond the committee members for whom it was intended. In my writing process the pressure to produce a high-quality product has been self-driven, knowing that I must do justice to the issues herein that affect the people of color in my life, and beyond.

When my colleagues of color ask me what will happen with the research findings, I am forced to pause. While I do not explicitly label this a *critical* ethnography, it certainly has critical components, and its findings are not intended to die upon the defense, but rather provoke and foster change in our district's schools. At the same time, I am forced to pause because I have witnessed what happens when one speaks up and challenges the status quo in Cartfield. But when I return to my role as a mother and ask myself, *what actions do I wish to model for my son?*, and, more recently, *how can I use my whiteness to address racism* my responses to these questions foster the courage I need to take my next steps in this journey.

## **Research Design**

### **Data Collection**

I conducted ethnographic research to examine my two research questions: *how do Cartfield community members respond when evidence of racial inequity jeopardizes the narrative of a suburban district's "strong school system?"* and, *what are the affordances of and constraints to researcher's and participants' roles and voices when they use collaborative practices of analysis in qualitative research?* Ethnography provides a systematic approach to in-depth data collection and analysis that takes place over a significant period of time, in a specified setting. Furthermore, given the dissertation's focus on participants' language use, noteworthy is ethnography's ability to examine "how

cultural patterns support, deny, and change structures and uses of language” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 29).

In accordance with my ethnographic approach, I use multiple data sources to respond to my research questions (please see Table 1 for a summary). In order to address my first research question, *how do community members respond when evidence of racial inequities jeopardizes the narrative of a suburban district’s “strong school system”?* I collect data sources for purposes of examining how various community members (parents, school administrators, journalists, elected school committee members) use verbal and written language when discussing racial inequities and issues of race.

Between March 2014 and November 2015 I wrote fieldnotes from my role as a participant observer in the four different groups, outlined below. Additionally, I collected email correspondence among school climate taskforce (SCT) members, and between SCT members and school committee representatives. I drew on media sources including 1) a radio forum from September 2014, 2) over 70 local newspaper items ranging from editorials, letters to the editor, and articles from the *Cartfield Times* and the *Chronicle Herald*, 3) and approximately 6.5 hours of transcribed excerpts from 15 school committee meetings (please see Appendix B). Additionally, I conducted interviews and focus groups with approximately 13 community members involved in the one or more of the groups (please see Appendix C for a list of interview questions). These participants were selected in effort to ensure a level of representation from the four different groups, as well as racial and gender representation (See Table 2). Generally interviews & focus groups lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. While I was able to hire someone to do school committee meeting transcriptions as these are public documents, to protect

confidentiality, I transcribed each interview/focus group in full. I used NVivo 10 and NVivo 11 as a means to organize the various data sources. As I will explain in the analysis section of the chapter, I also used NVivo software for preliminary coding purposes.

Table 1: Summary of Research Design

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Collaborative analysis <sup>5</sup> (Y/N)
How do community members respond when evidence of racial inequities jeopardize the narrative of a suburban district's "strong school system"?	-school committee meeting fieldnotes (30 hours)	-ethnographic coding	N
	-EECS meeting fieldnotes (20hrs)	-ethnographic coding	N
	-SCT meeting fieldnotes (25hrs)	-ethnographic coding	N
	- <i>Undoing racism</i> event fieldnotes (20 hours)	-ethnographic coding	N
	-Approx. 60 emails among & between SCT members and School Committee representatives	-ethnographic coding & discourse analysis	N
	-radio forum	-ethnographic coding & discourse analysis	Y
	-Approx. 75 newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the Editor	-discourse analysis	Y
What are the affordances and constraints of research participant collaborative practices of analysis for the roles and voice of the researcher and participants in qualitative research?	-interviews (transcriptions)	-ethnographic coding & discourse analysis	N
	-focus groups (transcriptions)	-ethnographic coding & discourse analysis	N
	-school committee meetings (transcriptions of 6.5 hrs)	-discourse analysis	Y
	-audio recordings of collaborative data analysis sessions	-discourse analysis	Y
	-reflective journals	-ethnographic coding & discourse analysis	Y

<sup>5</sup> This column indicates if the data analysis for the particular data set included a collaborative analysis session with participants.



Table 2. Summary of Interview Participants

<b>NAME/ Gender</b>	<b>School Committee Member/ regular attendee</b>	<b>EECS member</b>	<b>SCT member</b>	<b>Undoing Racism member/ regular attendee</b>	<b>Person of color</b>	<b>District employee/ former employee</b>	<b>Grand/ Parent to child/ children in the district</b>
Len (m)	X (chair, elected member)				X		X
Thalia (f)	X (elected member)	X		X	X		X
Genevieve (f)	X (elected member)	X					X
Judy (f)	X (elected member)						X
Dan (m)	X (elected member)	X					
Mae (f)	X (regular attendee)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Amelia* (f)	X (regular attendee)	X				X	X
Julia (f)		X	X	X			X
Mary (f)		X	X		X		X
Sarah (f)	X (regular attendee)	X					
Bridget (f)		X	X	X			X
Robert (m)		X		X		X	
Beth (f)		X	X				X
Deb* (f)	X (regular attendee)	X					X
Loretta* (f)	X (regular attendee)						X
Will* (m)	X (regular attendee)	X		X			
TOTAL 12 (9 females 3 males)	8	11	4	6	2	3	8

In Table 2 above those rows that are shaded reflect information about participants who were invited (via email) for an interview, but declined participation either by way or their silence/lack of response to multiple emails (Len & Mary), through multiple attempts that ended with scheduling conflicts (Genevieve) or by overtly declining participation via email (Judy). While I have included these participants' characteristics, their information is not included in the TOTAL row at the bottom of the chart. Those participants whose name includes an asterisk (\*) designates these participants were part of a focus group, as opposed to interviewed individually. Had all (16 people) who were invited participated, the numbers would have better reflected the racial demographic of the town (4 out of 16, reflecting the town's population- 25% people of color). Instead, of the 12 who participated in interviews or the focus group, only 2 were people of color (17%). Despite the lack of representation from people of color via interviews, much of the discourse I include in my findings chapters is that of people of color, taken from school committee transcriptions, radio forum transcriptions, and at times, newspaper articles. It is through multiple sources, therefore, that I represent the counterstory.

### **Research Setting & Participants**

For various reasons the Cartfield school district is an ideal case to examine my research questions. Located in the northeast of the United States, the district exhibits all of the characteristics Oakes and Rogers (2006) outline in defining high-performing districts: those with "above-average educational spending in the state, highly qualified teachers, ample instructional materials, a well-stocked library, plentiful college preparatory classes" (p. 22). This suburban school district spends \$5000 more per pupil

than the state average. In the nearby urban district less than 25 miles away, the per pupil spending is \$1000 less than the state average. Furthermore, this district is an appropriate case given the number of students of color enrolled: in the 2014-2015 school year, students of color comprised 39% of the total enrollment.<sup>6</sup> This is representative with the 41% students of color enrolled in schools in the northeast region of the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

The majority of my data comes from my involvement and attendance at four different types of community forums. Whereas at the beginning of my data collection process I attended an array of meetings of the various community groups, I eventually identified four different groups/forums to focus my attention. My selection of the four groups was informed by my desire to see how community members from various contexts interpreted and discussed race and race-related issues. In some of the groups (Undoing Racism initiative) race and equity were always the focus given the goal of this group. At other forums (Cartfield Regional School Committee meetings) racial equity was rarely a designated agenda item, yet participation at these meetings allowed me to explore how the school committee members brought these issues into their discussions, or perhaps, left it out. I provide a description of each of the four groups I regularly attended, and my role as a participant observer in each.

### **Cartfield Regional School Committee**

The Cartfield Regional School Committee (CRSC) is composed of nine members from Cartfield and the three surrounding towns that compose the regional district (five members from Cartfield, two from Portland, one from Salem, and one from Lincolnville).

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics are from the state's Department of Education website, not included here so as to protect anonymity

Members are elected by the citizens of these towns and serve a two or three-year term. Of the nine members, five identify as males, and four as females. Two members are people of color, including the chair. The CRSC conducts monthly meetings that generally last 2-3 hours in length. The CRSC is charged with making decisions that concern the Cartfield Regional Middle School and the Cartfield Regional High School, and their decision-making process is ultimately informed by the District's mission statement: "our mission is the academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism".

Over the course of my data collection, I regularly attended the monthly school committee meetings. Open to the public, I attended these meetings as a parent of the child in the district. If I was unable to attend a meeting, for research purposes I viewed the online recording of it. On multiple occasions I made public statements during the public comment portion held at the beginning of each meeting, speaking as a parent, not a researcher.

### **Equity & Excellence in Cartfield's Schools (EECS)**

A task force of the Cartfield Regional School Committee, the EECS, was created in late spring 2014 by one of the Regional School Committee members (whose term has since ended, but the taskforce continues). Those involved in the taskforce develop and present recommendations surrounding issues of racial equity in the schools to the District and the School Committee. At the time, the EECS was composed of three subgroups, including a group that looked at issues of equity in schools (e.g. tracking, curriculum); one that examined district trends of discipline disparities; and one whose focus was

school racial climate. The EECS met (and continues to meet) monthly for two hour meetings.

I attended the monthly EECS meetings given my role as a School Climate Taskforce subgroup member. I came ready to report on the work had done in the SCT, and to hear updates from the other two subcommittees. My attendance in this group provided rich insight to racial inequity present in the district, be it the anecdotes about peoples' experiences, or statistics about student suspensions and other information.

### **School Climate Taskforce (SCT)**

During the time of this research the SCT met minimally once per month for two hours at a time. While two monthly meetings were regularly scheduled, frequently the EECS meetings were rescheduled and fell on the same days on which the SCT meetings had been previously scheduled. When this happened, SCT members attended the larger EECS meetings. One of the main initiatives of the SCT was drafting and presenting a policy to use participatory action research as a means to explore racial climate of the middle and high schools. Created in the autumn of 2014, the policy passed at the school committee level over a year later on November 10, 2015.

Of the groups in which I was involved, this was the one in which I played the most active role. While I spent many of the initial meetings sitting back and observing, over time my role evolved into being the point person of this group. As other members dropped out, I kept up the momentum by emailing the group about meeting times and identifying potential agenda items. I served much like a liaison between school committee members and the SCT, and fielded many emails from them about our presented topics. My role as the leader of this group was confirmed when the person in

charge of the key to our meetings space left the group for medical reasons and designated me as the key holder for the location where we meet.

## **Undoing Racism**

Undoing Racism is a group that was developed in the summer of 2014 by a group of community members. It strives to

bring people together to gain a deeper understanding of how race affects the Cartfield area and our nation, make connections with each other, and lay the groundwork for effective action to create a more equitable, interconnected, and inclusive community. (Undoing racism website)

Through the planning efforts of a 14-member steering committee, three of which serve as co-facilitators, Undoing Racism offers the greater community events such as film screenings and discussions, small group discussions, speakers, opportunities to build awareness, as well as to develop action agendas for dismantling racism. The free events are open to the public.

As a researcher at these workshops, I rarely actively took jottings, sensitive to the content being discussed, and the nature of the stories people disclosed. Thus, I saw my role in these workshops less as someone who was actively researching, but rather as a white citizen learning about my role in sustaining and undoing racism. I attended at least six different events, including an all-day, 8-hour workshop for white people.

During my attendance at these groups I collected materials (agendas, meeting minutes, handouts, etc.), and actively took jottings (unless noted otherwise). Upon return home from the meeting, or the following day, I used my jottings to write descriptive fieldnotes. As will be described in the data analysis section, I coded the fieldnotes just as I did the transcriptions from these meetings (e.g. school committee meetings), interviews,

and other sources. However, in writing the findings chapters, I did not showcase fieldnotes as much as I used community participants' discourse to illustrate themes. While I included the occasional fieldnote for purposes of contextualizing, I feature the voices of the participants so that they tell the story. This is not to imply my voice is limited in this work, however. In fact, throughout this work I write in the first person, using "I", and, intentionally use a collective "we" to situate myself among other white people, and/or to address white people directly. This is partly in effort to draw attention to whites and whiteness, positioning whites, and people of color who practice whiteness as perpetrators of racism. As Rogers and Mosley (2006) state, "whiteness studies are related to the intellectual movement of CRT and seek to theorize and problematize the construction of whiteness as an absent racial category and dominant social norm" (p. 466). My goal is to surface the role that whites and whiteness play in racism through my own written discourse. Similarly, use of the collective "we" is in direct response to *white talk* "talk that serves to insulate white people from examining their/our individual and collective roles in the perpetuation of racism" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 46).

### **Collaborative Data Analysis Sessions**

An explanation of the collaborative data analysis sessions unveils the data sources I used to examine my second question, *what are the affordances of and constraints to researcher's and participants' roles and voices when they use collaborative practices of analysis in qualitative research?* My rationale for conducting data analysis sessions is informed by my critical race theoretical framework, and storytelling and counterstorytelling as a tenet of CRT. *Counterstorytelling* is a common methodological tool that CRT scholars (Villenas, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 2005) apply in

order to highlight the oppression and experiences of people of color, which serve to counter masternarratives. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a strategy that is typically used in the data collection process- as a means to “add necessary contextual contours to the seeming objectivity of positivists perspectives” (Ladson-Billings, 2016, p. 19). Various scholars have critiqued the use of *counterstorytelling*, arguing that simply including narratives from people of color is insufficient in order to critically examine white supremacist ideology across our contexts (Duncan, 2005).

I apply *counterstorytelling* differently, and use it in my data analysis process. While this process will be discussed much more fully in chapter VI, I include a brief overview here. To examine my data sets I collaborated with people of color who have been active participants alongside me in Cartfield’s community organizing groups. I presented this opportunity to people of color who were involved in the SCT, and one person, Marie, chose to participate. Though not part of the SCT, I also reached out to Diane Sherry who also accepted my invitation. Her narrative is the impetus for my dissertation, and I believed her insight to be critical in analyzing the data.

The data collection of the collaborative data analysis sessions was derived from three separate gatherings which lasted 2-3 hours at a time. During these sessions I presented a chunk of data- be it a portion of a school committee transcription, a newspaper article, etc. The goal was not to get through a lot of data, but to deeply analyze a small chunk of it. Our sessions generally followed a loose agenda: check in, my presentation/explanation the data set, individual review of the data and response to the pre-session journal prompt (Appendix D). From there, we took turns discussing our thoughts and interpretation of the data set. Afterwards we individually responded to the



post-session journal prompt (Appendix E). We closed by debriefing about the process and our feelings.

Thus, the data sources that address this second research question include audio recordings of collaborative analysis sessions and reflective journals from participants partaking in these sessions (myself included). The audio recordings capture our real time interpretations of a particular data set, whereas the journals allow us to reflect on if, and how, our analysis was influenced by the other participants' interpretations. Taken together, these sources allow me to examine the role of *counterstorytelling* in the data analysis process and its impact on researcher/participant roles.

### **Data Analysis**

My analysis was informed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), ethnographic coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1991). In each of the following sections I describe these processes in greater detail.

#### **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory emphasizes developing analytic stances, rather than approaching the data with preconceived assumptions. This approach allows the themes to evolve from the data, rather than the researcher looking for evidence of predetermined themes. To respond to the first research question I began by open coding my interview and focus group transcriptions. I began with these sources of data as I wanted to use participants' voices to identify emerging themes. Open coding is an in-depth, line-by-line analysis of a data set. Beyond categorizing the data, it allows "to name, distinguish, and identify the conceptual importance and significance of particular observations" (Emerson et al., 1995,

p. 151). The original open coding of the one focus group (five participants) and interviews (seven participants) was conducted using NVivo software, which facilitates labeling processes. The initial coding process yielded 84 “nodes” or codes. I then categorized these 84 codes according to their similarities and came up with nine different categories. For example, the category I titled “experience with schools” included the following codes: post-racial; multicultural ed (or lack thereof); colorblind approach; class; high parent expectations. Another category “schools need work” included the following codes: more teachers of color needed; who schools serve (student attrition an issue); dominant culture persists; hostile culture of school; fear; top down approach in the district; police role (silences students); silence; silencing.

I began my coding and categorizing process before I finished collecting data. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) indicate the importance of coding early on in the data collection process as it informs additional observations and interviews (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010, p. 210). Focused coding followed the open coding process. Emerson et al. (1995) state, “in focused coding, the researcher constantly makes comparisons between incidents, identifying examples that are comparable on one dimension where that differ on some dimension and hence constitute contrasting cases or variations” (p. 161). I reviewed additional data sources (school committee transcriptions, emails, newspaper articles, and my fieldnotes) to look for trends in these sources that reflect the codes and categories that had emerged from the original analysis. For purposes of identifying trends *within* each individual group, and *across* the four groups I coded the fieldnotes in two different ways. First I coded the fieldnotes from each individual group (e.g. school committee, EECS, SCT, and *Undoing Racism*) so as to find emerging themes

independent from the other groups. I then coded *across* the group meetings to examine the themes collectively. Throughout the entire ethnographic coding and data analysis processes I wrote and revisited analytical memos.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

In addition to ethnographic coding, I also conducted discourse analysis of particular texts, specifically those that showcase public discourse- school committee transcripts and newspaper articles. Actors' discourse plays an important role in examining how they uphold or challenge the values expressed in the Cartfield district mission statement as well as how they perform racism. Gee (1996) distinguishes between small d discourse and capital D Discourse, noting that peoples' talk serves to construct/maintain social identity and social power structures (at an individual, group, and societal level). As Chick (2002) explains, "dominant groups establish and sustain their hegemony by means of ideological strategies" (463) which happens through discursive practices. This is an important consideration when examining how people who possess varying degrees of power in society sustain or resist racial inequities. Further, van Dijk (1987) posited that racism is perpetuated through everyday text and talk (newspapers, conversations, television, textbooks, etc.) Thus, as Rogers and Mosley (2006) point out, white privilege and whiteness, which uphold racism, are "encoded" through talk and text. Specifically, they note:

Discourse is conceptualized as a set of social practices that both construct and reflect the social world and benefit some people at the expense of others. Discourse may be seen as the crucial interface between the social and cognitive dimensions of race. Tools such as language, symbol systems, nonverbal gestures, art, and media all work to construct and represent whiteness as normalized and privileged. Competing values are seen as deviant. Through our tools for sense making, whiteness is

normalized and the associated privileges are made invisible. (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 467)

For these reasons, I combine discourse analysis and ethnographic coding.

### **Collaborative Data Analysis Sessions**

#### **Additional Analysis Process**

Simultaneously to my coding process, I was also engaging with my participants in collaborative data analysis sessions. Thus, I re-analyzed various texts in partnership with my collaborative analysis group participants. We conducted critical discourse analysis of primarily two sources- school committee meeting transcriptions & newspaper articles, but also reviewed email correspondence and a radio forum together, for purposes of triangulation. Participants did not analyze interview transcriptions with me in effort to maintain confidentiality, given that the analysis group participants know many of those who were interviewed. Conducting discourse analysis allows researchers to see the broader social context. Examining peoples' discourse is an essential step in determining how it controls less powerful groups, and the consequences that result such as social inequality, or racial inequity (van Dijk, 2001). "Discourse analysis is increasingly considered and applied as a tool in the social sciences as it attempts to explore the construction of socially created ideas and things in the world as well as their maintenance over time" (Souto-Manning, 2014a, p 203). The structure of our analysis was intentionally non-structured. While I contemplated asking my participants to use Mica Pollock's (2004) concept of *colormuteness*- the silence around issues of race- as a lens to inform our critical discourse analysis, after some reflection and informal consultation with other scholars (e.g. conversations at the American Anthropological Association 2015 Annual Meeting) I decided against providing a framework and left it up to my

participants to identify what speaks to them. That being said, my own interpretation of the data was informed by Pollock's construct, and I looked closely at how school committee members and school administrators embraced or resisted discussing race-related issues that the community groups broached (e.g. discipline disparities, class tracking systems which resulted in segregated classes, issues of school climate). I also examined newspaper sources for similar trends, and identified similarities and differences in how race is presented in each of these contexts.

### **Analysis of the Collaborative Session Data**

To explore my dissertation's second question I utilized the recorded conversations of collaborative data analysis sessions and reflective journals. In listening to our recorded data analysis sessions I looked for discursive acts that show evidence of *counterstorytelling*- examples of negotiation, disagreement, or moments of understanding. What causes each of us to interpret the data as we do (what lived experience, theoretical grounding?) and how do we challenge each other's perspectives by sharing these experiences? The reflective journals that each group member wrote at the beginning and end of our sessions were intended to capture if and to what extent each of our interpretations of the data sets changed as a result of our collaboration. How do our colleague's interpretations influence our own? What are the *counterstories* that provoked these changes? I conducted ethnographic coding and data analysis to address these questions. I then reviewed the findings with my collaborative data analysis participants. Marie, Diane and I gathered to read the contents of chapter VI, during which time I sought their feedback and made any suggested changes.

The remaining chapters respond to the two research questions. Chapters IV and V discuss the first research question, and chapter VI responds to the second research question. As noted, chapter VI was read collaboratively with Marie and Diane in effort to verify the findings/conduct member checks. In addition, for similar purposes, I invited community members to read chapters IV and V as well. In addition to Marie and Diane, I extended the invitation to three white men, and five additional women of color. I chose participants who I had not directly interviewed during the data collection phase. My goal in inviting in community members was to draw on community members who have/had children who attend(ed) Cartfield schools, or who they themselves had worked in the district, in effort to seek feedback. Of those invited, five women of color accepted the invitation. I did not hear from two of the white men, and one reluctantly declined given his busy schedule.

In March 2017 five participants and I gathered in my home to read chapter IV and portions of chapter V. After briefly explaining my methods and data sources, I asked them to jot any feedback, questions, etc. they had for me as I read. At the conclusion of each section I invited feedback, taking notes to help inform the edits for future revisions. In addition to reading portions of the dissertation, my guests and I also began a discussion about potential next steps for its contents. How do we disseminate the contents of this research so that the contents can, “dance off these pages and find a new platform where they will be heard and seen by various audiences?” We continue to contemplate this question.

## CHAPTER IV

### STRONG SCHOOLS FOR WHOM?

*Whenever we get into a discussion about race, white people always ask us for proof that racism exists. I would like for the discussion to begin at a place where we acknowledge that racism exists and take it from there... It does exist. We live in a racist, unequal society. Cartfield is not different.* (Comment from audience member Marie, Community Radio Forum, 8-21-14)

On August 21, 2014 a local radio station hosted a live radio forum on the Cartfield town common. The radio station holds regular monthly forums in various local communities in order to explore a relevant topic with community member panelists and the general public present. The forum is held in a public space and all community members are welcome to ask questions and make comments. This particular forum was entitled *Reading, Writing, and Racism?* and intended to explore the presence of racism in Cartfield, and in the Cartfield schools. One of the two radio announcers hosting the event began with the following introductory statement:

It's been said that we live in a post-racial society, and there are moments, like this one, right here in the middle of Cartfield on a very nice August morning when you might think it true. But events not far away suggest otherwise. We talk mostly the racial divide coast-to-coast, but in Cartfield? A series of racial incidents at Cartfield Regional High School and the way they were handled has created divisions in town. While there is passionate support for the school's administration, there are others who speak of institutional racism, and that the events of the past year point to a pattern. A community that has long prided itself on tolerance, inclusion and social justice has been forced to look inward (Radio Forum Host, 8-21-14).

In the opening comment Marie's encouragement to acknowledge racism's existence, and to begin the conversation with this understanding, is in direct contrast with the purpose the radio forum served: to educate by providing "proof" (to use Marie's words). Conversations often contemplate the existence of racism by way of enlisting

people of color to share their experiences as a form of proof that racism is prominent (see Akom, 2008; Guillermo-Wann, 2010 which exemplify this notion). The radio forum was no different, and displayed where Cartfield is in racism-related conversations; the goal is still very much on closing the wide gap between those who acknowledge racism's presence, either by way of first-hand experience or through kinship with people of color, and those who, in the words of a former district white employee "just don't get it" (Interview with Robert, 12-18-15).

An audience member's comments, and the radio host's response, illustrate this gap further. Alaina, an audience member of color, called into question the title of the community radio forum, *Reading, Writing and Racism?*, directing her comments towards the radio host:

One of the things I noticed when I went to the radio's website was the question mark behind the word racism. Please, please, please do not do that. It's a microaggression that really does affect those who are hit hard by this institutional situation called racism (Alaina, audience member, Community Radio Forum, 8-21-14)

The radio announcer and host of the forum responded, "the [school] administration also had issues with the question mark, and the lack of the question mark, because it implied that there is racism in the school system" (Community Radio Forum, 8-21-14). Made obvious by this interaction are peoples' varying perceptions about racism's existence in Cartfield; some people outwardly and openly acknowledge racism, whereas others' lack of acknowledgement, as I will argue, works to sustain its presence. The school district administrators' response, and their desire for the question mark in the title, is indicative of the denial the district upholds about the presence of racism. Likewise, the fact that the



radio station maintained the use of the question mark shows how the media supported the school district's stance that Cartfield is free of racism until "proven" otherwise.

### **The Perception of Racism in Cartfield**

There is a sense from many Cartfield residents that the town is racially divided in terms of people's perception of racism. The divide exists in the form of those who acknowledge and understand the existence of racism, and those who continue to question whether or not racism, in the form of racial inequities, exists. In an interview, Robert, a white man, spoke to this.

I remember the town had a grant in 2007 or 2008 that they got through the health department to look at race issues...it was very clear that people of color think there's racism all the time in Cartfield and the white people don't think there is. They just don't get it. White people don't see racism, and if they don't have friends of color at a certain level of closeness and safety they don't hear about it. And I remember thinking, I don't know how much I can do to reduce racism in the town, but we outta be able to reduce at least some of that disconnect- you know people of color think there's a lot of racism and white people don't think there's any. (Robert, Interview, 12-18-15).

Robert made a similar comment during the community radio forum, when asked by the forum host if he believes that Cartfield and the Cartfield schools are "any more or less facing the issue of race and racism than any other school district in the region, or in the country for that matter?" Robert responded:

I have lived in Cartfield for a long time and worked in the schools for many, many years. And during that time I have often heard white people say, 'you know, there isn't really any racism in Cartfield.' And I repeat that to people of color and they roll their eyes or they say 'oh my God, I experience racism every week if not every day or more.' So that kind of divide between the perception of white people and the perception of the people of color in Cartfield is a particular difficulty for our town. (Community Radio Forum, 8-21-14)

In both of his comments Robert distinguishes between those who acknowledge racism, and those who don't. He divides these two groups based on race, noting that people of color acknowledge racism, while whites tend not to. And while the data from this study illustrate this distinct racial divide is much more blurred, his distinction is not completely unsupported. Anti-racism workshops, for example, commonly work with white people apart from people of color because typically the two groups are in two very different places in their anti-racist identity development. Whites have a different degree of understanding given that they experience privilege because of their skin color, unlike most of their peers of color. While racism is an everyday experience for people of color, white people need to be explicitly taught about it, particularly their passive role in maintaining the societal structures that position whites as being superior to other races Leonardo (2013).

Both Marie and Robert's comments reflect that Cartfield community members' awareness of, acknowledgement of, as well as their ability to dismantle racism vary from one another, exhibiting different levels of anti-racist identity development, and varying degrees of racial literacy. So while Marie requests that Cartfield residents come to a level of understanding and acknowledge that racism and inequities exist in town (Open up/Acknowledgement (Level 6) on *The Ladder of Empowerment*), I argue that Cartfield residents, many with whom I came in contact during my research, are not yet at that level.

Dan, for example, a former school committee member, questions if there is racial inequity in the schools. For him, a white man, it is something he does not witness

firsthand, and thus must trust that the experiences people of color share are true. He noted:

One of my most frustrating things is that you hear anecdotal stories that have gone on, and you don't know. First you don't know if they're true, for starters, then the second thing is you don't know how wide-spread that is. You do know that these people that tell the stories are really pissed off about it, so it makes you think something must have happened; it makes you think they're true. But I wish there was some collection method for people to go online and you could collect these stories to see how many there are, see if many are similar, and then possibly measure if they're increasing or decreasing over time (Interview with Dan, 4-1-16).

Dan exemplifies this desire for the *proof* which Marie alludes to in the comment at the beginning of the chapter. He is looking for a system that would essentially legitimize the stories of people of color, suggesting that otherwise their stories are not valid. Dan also seeks a way of *measuring* the racial climate, and believes one way of doing this would be to quantify the different stories that are collected in a given time frame- the more people who have stories, the worse the racial climate. In this sense, Dan's discourse alludes to racism as people's *individual* experiences, disconnected from hierarchical/power structures in society that affect people of color, and white people, in varying ways.

Noteworthy is that Dan is a former school committee member. In his position he was part of a group of people who create, sustain or alter school policy- policies that affect white students and students of color in Cartfield. In chapter V I uncover the relationship between Cartfield community members' racial literacy and the existing racial inequities in the school district. First, however, this chapter serves to assert that racial inequity exists in the high-performing, racially diverse school district that is Cartfield.

### **Providing Proof in Effort to Decrease the "Divide"**

Marie's words that open this chapter cause me to pause and contemplate whether including the information and anecdotes that people of color provide, undermines Marie's request to move beyond having to prove that racism exists. It does indeed; it undermines Marie the same way a white person asks a person of color to explain his/her experiences with racism. This is noteworthy because by choosing to dedicate a chapter to the experiences of people of color, I am perpetuating and appeasing a white-dominant orientation. This is the contradictory nature of the *counterstory*. In positioning the perspectives of people of color as *counter*, it upholds the dominant narrative as truth. By showcasing numerous counterstories from Cartfield community members, I hope to display that these are not just a few examples, but indeed a way of life in the Cartfield school district, and that the "strong schools" narrative constitutes a closer look. The recurring themes in the stories from students of color, former employees of color, former white employees, school alumni, current parents of color, and current white parents will allow us to "*begin at a place where we acknowledge that racism exists and take it from there...*" Theirs is not a single story (Adichie, 2007), but a series of stories that display the prominence of racial inequities in a high-performing district. This chapter attempts to respond to one woman of color who is a multi-decade resident of the town. She said that in order to move forward, "I need to be heard, I need to be validated about concerns I have in terms of racism and equality" (Betty, Radio forum). This chapter is meant not only to validate people like Betty, but to also reach those people like Dan who search for proof, as well as for those Robert described who "just don't get it". Above all, the need to use space to compile the stories from racism's existence in town, is a statement in itself

about where Cartfield residents are in their journey towards understanding racism and developing their racial literacy practices.

The following sections provide excerpts from former employees of color, former students of color, school committee members, parents of color, and white parents. While lengthy at times, their words paint a picture of the inequities that exist in Cartfield's schools. Though these are individual stories collected from the past few years- stories that affect current residents, together they paint a picture of the ongoing racial climate in Cartfield's schools and the discrepancy between the stated policy (the district's mission statement) and what actually takes place. The *disconnect* Robert described, and Dan's discourse illustrated, show that Cartfield is not in a place where we can heed Marie's desire and move beyond having to prove racism's existence.

## **Findings**

### **The Cartfield School District: Perceived as a Strong School System with a Diverse Student Population**

The Cartfield district exhibits all of the characteristics Oakes and Rogers (2006) outline in defining high-performing districts: those with "above-average educational spending in the state, highly qualified teachers, ample instructional materials, a well-stocked library, plentiful college preparatory classes" (p. 22). The Cartfield district spends \$5000 more per pupil than the state average. In the nearby urban district less than 25 miles away, the per pupil spending is \$1000 less than the state average. One aspect that Oakes and Rogers (2006) don't mention, but one that has become an increasingly popular indicator of school performance is state standardized test scores. Such results

help Cartfield High School rank in the top 8% of the nation's 21,000 public high schools<sup>7</sup>.

The dominant narrative in the region is that the Cartfield district is a strong school system, and many people take this into consideration when choosing where to live. Various parents I interviewed noted that they were drawn to the district because of its reputation, but also because of its [racial] diversity. Bridget's knowledge of the schools came from her husband who attended college in the area, and she (white) and her husband (a person of color) were attracted to the area given its proximity to family and its diversity. Bridget, in her late 30s, noted her reasons for moving to Cartfield, "Cartfield was really the only place we decided we'd be willing to move, wanting some place that did have diversity and wasn't too far from [previous location], and also great schools" (Bridget, interview, 1-28-16). Bridget's rationale for moving here is reflected by others who have lived here for over a decade, showing that Cartfield schools have upheld a strong reputation throughout the years. Beth, and Dan, for example, also decided to move to Cartfield for reasons similar to those Bridget referenced. Beth, a white woman in her 40s, has lived in town since the early 2000s. She was first drawn to Cartfield for employment opportunities and the fact that it is geographically situated between her family and her husband's family. When pushed to explain further why she and her partner decided on Cartfield as opposed to other surrounding towns, "schools and diversity" was her response (interview, 1-20-16). Dan, in his 60s and also white like Bridget and Beth, moved to Cartfield in the early 2000s when his children were in middle

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. News and World Report (2016) The U.S. News rankings include data on more than 21,000 public high schools in 50 states and the District of Columbia. Schools were awarded gold, silver or bronze medals based on their performance on state assessments, their graduation rates and how well they prepare students for college.

school and high school. He had been told that Cartfield has “the best schools for lowest cost of living.” In sharing this response Dan laughed, and questioned the cost of living part of that equation (fieldnotes, 4-1-16). When I asked him to specify further and to define “good schools” he alluded to standardized test score results (both state mandated and SATs), as well as college acceptance rates (87.5% for all students- reflective of the 87.3% state average).

The “good schools” narrative captured by Bridget, Beth and Dan is certainly not the only reason people move to Cartfield, where the median single family home is \$345,500 (2013)<sup>8</sup>, but the high-performing schools are one justification some people pay the high rent, or invest in real estate, and consequently pay the high property taxes (\$21.00 per \$1000.00 assessed valued; making Cartfield a town that has higher property taxes than 95% of the other 300 municipalities in the state<sup>9</sup>). As described in a report about the Cartfield Housing Market:

Cartfield is a highly desirable place to live for reasons that go beyond the economic and real estate market evaluation presented in this report. It has many qualities that are difficult to quantify, yet they play a significant role in attracting people to live in Cartfield and therefore have an impact on the housing market. Some of these qualities include the high value placed on education, excellent local schools, good town services, a diverse population, and the vibrancy and cultural amenities...all set in a scenic and largely preserved natural landscape with viable farms, fields, and woodlands (p. 3-1)<sup>10</sup>

The rental market is also expensive, given the housing demand that results from the large number of students in the area enrolled in higher education (over half of the town’s

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<sup>8</sup> Reference not included for anonymity. Information is from a national newspaper from May, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Reference not included to protect anonymity. Information is from a document that contains property tax rates in the state in 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Information is from Cartfield’s town website, not specified here to protect anonymity.

residences are rented)<sup>11</sup>. As a result, Cartfield's housing market is accessible to upper-middle class residents. But the town's commitment to low-income housing draws in residents from a lower socioeconomic bracket as well, making Cartfield less homogeneous when it comes to class. Cartfield meets the state law that requires 10% of a municipality's housing stock be affordable (1,034 subsidized housing units out of 9,621 total housing units (10.7%)).<sup>12</sup> Yet, of the students enrolled in the district schools, 18.5% are defined as economically disadvantaged, well below the state average of 27.4%.

Cartfield is also racially diverse, and in the case of Bridget and Beth, this element of diversity was a characteristic that attracted them to the town. Twenty-one percent of Cartfield is comprised of people of color (U.S. Census, 2010), comparable to 19.6% state-wide. The number of students of color enrolled in the schools (k-12) is even greater. In the 2014-2015 school year, students of color comprised 40% of the total enrollment<sup>13</sup>, a number reflective of the national population of which 37% are people of color. As Table 3 shows, over time, Cartfield's enrollment has consistently reflected state averages, and in some cases (e.g. percent of Asian students and percent of multi-race, non-Hispanic students) surpasses the state averages.

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<sup>11</sup> Reference not included to protect anonymity. Information is from Cartfield's town website.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.massaffordablehomes.org/mahamap.html>

<sup>13</sup> Statistics are from the state's Department of Education website, not included here so as to protect anonymity.



Table 3. Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity 2000 and 2016 for Cartfield and Statewide

Race/Ethnicity	% of District (2000)	% of State (2000)	% of District (2016)	% of State (2016)
African American	9.7	8.6	7.1	8.8
Asian	7.3	4.3	9.3	6.5
Hispanic	7.7	10.2	14.6	18.6
Native American	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.2
White	74.9	76.6	60.1	62.7
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander			0.1	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic			8.6	3.2

The Cartfield school district publicly alludes to the socioeconomic and racial diversity of its students. As it reads on the district website, its mission is “the academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism.” However, research data show there is a discrepancy between the stated mission statement and the existing reality.

### **The Cartfield School District: “Strong Schools” for Whom?**

*Even though we do better than many school systems- with graduation rates, grades, honors class, AP classes, participation in band and chorus, discipline statistics, parent involvement- all of those things show racial disparities. (Robert, interview, 12-18-2015)*

Data from this study show that the district’s schools do not reflect the “strong school” narrative portrayed and perceived by most. Instead, the data call into question the accuracy of the district’s mission statement: the academic achievement of *every* student. People of color and white people shared their experiences.

### **Employees of Color: Experiences of Overt and Institutional Racism**

In the fall of 2013 and into the winter of 2014, Diane Sherry, a Cartfield High School teacher of color was subjected to multiple racist attacks which ranged from hate

speech graffiti, to slashed tires, as well as a chair that was disassembled but appeared to look put together so that when Diane sat on it, both she and the chair fell. On February 10, 2014, to Cartfield Regional High School students and staff, Diane Sherry presented a video of herself in which she explained her experiences (featured in full in Chapter I). After sharing the overt racist attacks she experienced on a personal level, later in her statement Ms. Sherry discussed the high school culture, and the effects of the institutional racism that she felt and witnessed.

Ms. Sherry described what she experienced as an employee of color at Cartfield Regional High School. Despite this statement to students and staff, and regardless of expressing her concern to the Cartfield District administration, the attacks continued throughout the spring months of 2014. Ms. Sherry no longer felt safe in her own classroom, and eventually in May 2014 she made the decision to take a leave without pay (*Cartfield Times*, 8-29-14, p. 1). She did not return to her classroom that school year, and a replacement teacher was hired for the remainder of the 2013-2014 academic year. Sherry officially resigned from her position a few weeks into the 2014-2015 school year.

Sherry's story is not unique, and by sharing her story she helped (re)start conversations about the experiences of people of color in the district. Her statement triggered additional people of color to come forward and express their experiences with individual and institutional racism in the schools. Mae, a former employee of color in the district, was one of those people. At the March 25, 2014 school committee meeting, Mae provided an example of the overt racism she encountered from her colleagues during her tenure:

When I first started working in this school a young white staff member passed me by and said ‘some people have to work hard to get a job here’ code word for ‘you’re an affirmative action hire; you’re not qualified.’ I have a master’s degree in education; I was qualified to work as a paraprofessional (Transcription of school committee meeting public comment, 3-25-14).

In an interview, Mae shared further about why she pursued a job at the school, and her challenges working there during her seven years of employment. Like Diane Sherry, she was excited about how the school presented itself, especially its multicultural oriented values: “I was impressed with the statement the district had on its website around social justice and multicultural education. And that attracted me” (Mae, interview, 1-5-16). Yet over time, she noticed a discrepancy between the stated policies and what played out. In Mae’s case, the educational displays she created that she deliberately designed to align with the district’s mission, were not well received by other district employees.

One of my tasks was to maintain and design the bulletin boards. I used the multicultural/social justice statement to make sure that those bulletin boards had that focus. But gradually, it turned out that, I don’t know who or which ones, but teachers didn’t like it. An example of one was during women’s history month. I had taken images I had retrieved from websites or magazines that were available and had this multicultural array of women. And one of the statements on the front entry bulletin board was the majority of the world’s population are women of color who do not speak English. And I recall a picture of Bessy Coleman who was the first woman to earn a pilot’s license. And I remember people were bothered by that, thinking that Amelia Earhart was the first woman to get her pilot’s license...So I made sure that that kind of approach was what I used when designing these bulletin boards. But as I said, gradually people didn’t like it. (Mae, interview 1-5-16).

Both Diane and Mae’s experiences reflect larger challenges the district experiences: issues of recruitment and retention of teachers of color.

## **A Lack of Teachers of Color: Issues of Recruitment and Retention**

Diana and Mae are just two examples of people of color who no longer work in the district. While district administrators often speak about how their focus needs to be on the recruitment and hiring of teachers of color, teacher of color retention is an equally large problem. As the enrollment of students of color increases, the number of staff of color has increased gradually as well, though whether these staff members are teachers is unknown. In the 2010-2011 academic year employees of color comprised 13% of the total number. This number increased to 14% and 15% in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years, respectively. In 2015-2016 this number was at 20%. Important to note, however, is that these statistics reflect all staff members of color, and do not distinguish between classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, custodial staff, cafeteria workers, or administrators, for example. So while the numbers reflect that more people of color are employed in the district, how many are in positions that interface with students in a teaching/administrative capacity is unknown. In a focus group I held, members discussed the staff of color who, in recent years, had left the district.

I held a focus group with people who work together to do volunteer advocacy work on behalf of various district students and their families. Focus group participants noted that part of the reason they can do the work they do is that they no longer have children enrolled in the district schools, so there is minimal risk involved.

Sarah: I don't have kids in the school. Well you still have grandkids (*talking to Amelia*), but at least for some of us we're not afraid of them, and I think they're used to having people be afraid of them. So what are they gonna do to me, fire me? The difference is we're not intimidated by them, I think that's our strength.

Deb: And we're not nervous about them getting in the way of our kids' chances of going to Wellesley or anything like that. (stated with sarcasm)

Sarah: Or firing us. Because we don't work there. I'm sure there's lots of teachers and school counselors and staff [who] have stories to tell but they're not going to tell them.

Deb: That's a whole story in itself. How many black people have stopped working there? And we don't even know why.

*They start discussing specific teachers and sports coaches and conclude that in the last four years one person of color has left each of those years- a significant number, they note, considering the few teachers of color to begin with. The discussion continued, focusing on the lack of data about the reasons why people leave the district; a result of the fact that exit interviews are not conducted with departing employees. (fieldnotes, 2-2-16).*

While teachers of color are leaving, few are being replaced. This is captured by a letter to the editor published on October 2, 2015. It reads:

To the Editor: I was just looking at the *Cartfield Times* and the photos of the new Cartfield teachers. While I welcome and respect these teachers, it makes me sad not to see any black faces. Let's really make the changes needed so that Cartfield can be a safe and welcoming place for everyone. We owe it to the children and to ourselves. -*Cartfield Resident (Cartfield Times, 10-2-15, p. 4)*

The author is referring to a front page article that showcased, through photographs and written introductions, the new teacher hires for the 2015-2016 school year. This was a full academic year after the fall of 2014 when Diane Sherry announced she would not return. The letter's author references making Cartfield a "safe and welcoming place for everyone"- in particular the black teachers she is hoping the district will hire. At various times Diane Sherry publicly disclosed that she felt her (physical) safety was compromised. And, as focus group members speculated, teachers who disrupt the status quo are let go, and therefore one "goes with the flow" out of fear of being fired. Fear and safety were words frequently brought up in discussing the experience of people of color.

The hostile climate was well captured when one focus group member noted, “if you can’t do it, you’re outta here.” Jack, another focus group member made a slight correction to that statement: “if you can’t do it *their way*”. *Their way or no way*. My fieldnotes capture this:

...focus group members draw connections between how the administration deals with teachers, and how they deal with “difficult” students. They remind each other of various discipline cases- *remember that kid who...?* and *I recall when...* They talk over and amongst each other sharing various stories. They conclude that just as teachers who rock the boat too much are dismissed, the administration uses a punitive approach with disruptive students, rather than addressing the needs of these students in a supportive fashion. Most of the students they speak about have been described as people of color and/or from families of a lower socioeconomic status.

Amidst the stories Loretta is moved to share something. She takes out a crumpled piece of paper and asks permission to read a poem given to her by a mutual acquaintance of everyone present (myself included). She introduces the poem as being from the biography of Biko Woods, but I later learn it is from the book *Biko* written by Donald Woods<sup>14</sup>. Before starting to read the statement, Loretta comments, “These are people who are finally being held accountable for their racism. Whether they’re aware that they’re racist, or not” She goes on to read:

*For once they were in a position of having to account for themselves.*

*These men displayed symptoms of extreme insularity*

*They are people whose upbringing has impressed upon them the divine right to retain power*

Loretta stops reading to comment, “that’s who we’re dealing with in Cartfield.” and then continues:

*In that sense they are innocent men, incapable of thinking or acting differently*

*On top of that they have gravitated toward an occupation that has given them all the scope they need to express their rigid personalities.*

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<sup>14</sup> Woods, a white South African newspaper editor was a close friend of Steve Biko and writes a book to tell Biko’s story. In the book he exposes the six days of torture Biko was subjected to by South African police which killed him. Woods’ act of exposing the event helped start the black revolution.

*They have been protected for years by laws of the country.*

*They have been able to carry out all of their imaginative torture practices quite undisturbed in cells and rooms all over the country, with tactic official sanction*

*And they have been given status by the government as the men who protect the state from subversion*

By the end of the poem Loretta is emotional; the volume and quiver of her voice show she is angry, yet the tears capture her sadness, or perhaps a sense of helplessness. Once finished reading she quickly and loudly blurts out, “and that is who is running through Cartfield. And that is when you talk to students who have been kept in rooms, for years on end, without access to education, who have been kicked out ... not being able to go to school... putting them in suspension. If we had not gotten involved, they would’ve continued that torture. And it is abusive, and it is violent what they’re doing.” After a few comments from her peers she continues, “And that is who we’re taking on. That, (waving the poem) gives us a sense. That is Paul Williams [the high school principal]. That’s why it’s not always easy to necessarily identify, because it’s happening in the classroom, it’s happening in the hallways, it’s a white dominant narrative.” Sarah concurs, “it’s the culture, they swim in it” (Fieldnotes, 2-2-16).

Loretta, like all of the group members present, does advocacy work for various students who experience difficulties/maltreatment within the district. These cases bring them face-to-face with various district administrators. Loretta and others see firsthand that the district administrators are not ensuring the academic success of *every* student. The following stories from multiple students show that even those who are not involved in the most severe cases still experience a level of inequity in their educational experiences.

### **Students of Color: Discipline and Achievement Disparities**

#### **Discipline Disparities**

*Last school committee [meeting] when I was here, you guys were talking about the discipline disparities. You guys were talking about it like as in numbers, and these are not numbers. I want to remind you that these are*

*lives. This is my life, these are my brothers' lives (choking up).* (Felicia, transcribed from public comment portion of Cartfield school committee meeting, 1-28-14).

At a school committee meeting Felicia, a Latina high school senior at the time, referenced the most recent discipline disparities between white students, and students of color. Table 4<sup>15</sup> displays the discipline statistics at the high school level and illustrates the racial discipline disparities.

Table 4. Cartfield Regional High School Suspension Data (2015-2016)

<b>Race</b>	<b>Percent of School Population</b>	<b>Percent of Discipline Cases</b>
Asian	9.6	3
Black	7	9
Latino	13.5	30
Multi-racial	8.7	15
White	61.1	42

While students of color comprise 39% of the population, they are assigned 57% of the discipline cases, as opposed to the 61% of white students who hold 42%. Both Latino and Multi-racial students are disciplined at twice their percentage rates. The most notable discrepancy is the 13.5% Latinos who maintain 30% of the disciplinary cases. In her interview, Mae provided an example of an incident she witnessed when she was substitute teaching in one of the district's schools. While the example is from Mae's experience in an elementary school, I include it here to humanize these statistics per Felicia's reminder that "*these are lives*".

One day I was in one of the elementary schools. I think it was the second grade. There was a fire drill so the class had to go outside. So the class is outside on the grass. The kids are playing on the grass, and with each

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<sup>15</sup> The statistics contained in this, and all other tables are taken from the state's Department of Education website.



other. When the teacher sees something that one of the black students is doing in the grass, she has the child stand up and then is admonishing the child in front of the whole class, and what apparently could be the whole school because all the kids are outside because of the fire drill. But there's a white boy engaged in the exact same behavior, and she was totally ignoring that student. (Mae, interview 1-5-16)

During the focus group, Loretta, a CRHS alumna, reflected on her first-hand experience as a white student in the high school. She described one incident when she should have been disciplined for her actions, but received no consequence. In her history class students often said "blatantly classist and racist shit" yet the teacher never intervened. Loretta struggled in class because she did not like the way the teacher was teaching history, and often went "head-to-head" with him. Loretta shared her actions the day she was pushed to her limits. When a fellow student made a disrespectful comment:

I got up, I didn't throw it [a desk] over my head, but I pushed it on top of him [the student], and I raced out. But nothing ever happened to me. There was no consequences for me. I didn't get suspended. I didn't receive a detention. In fact there was never any follow up by the teacher or any staff members about what happened here (Focus group, 2-2-2016).

Perhaps had there been a disciplinary consequence for this white student, it might have exposed the classism and racism that Loretta described permeating the classroom and which drove her to throw the desk. Loretta suggested that the lack of punishment was a way for the teacher and/or administration to protect themselves, but certainly the fact that she is white played a large part. Dan made a similar point in his interview. He explained the various factors involved in who is detained or suspended, and that not all discipline cases are a direct result of a teacher or administrator assigning blame.

The other problem with the discipline is that it might be more not so much with the serious things, but the discipline disparities may be more to do with white kids...they may be more skilled at talking their way out of a discipline, or behave differently, or behave the way the teacher wants them to behave (4-1-2016).

Here, Dan alludes to the ideas of white privilege and social capital in his comment, and the role these play in discipline numbers. While his comment is speculative in nature, important to remember is that the majority of the teachers in the district are white, which might work in favor of white students who are trying to work their way out of any punishment.

### **Achievement Disparities**

In addition to discussing discipline disparities during the public comment portion of the January 28, 2014 school committee meeting, Felicia returned months later on April 8, 2014 to address achievement disparities. During her public comment she reminded committee members of multiple things, among which were two facts 1) Latinos pass the state standardized tests at a much lower rate than their peers, and 2) fewer go on to college. Drawing on statistical data from the state's website, Table 5 and Table 6 showcase the 4-year graduation rate for the district and the state, respectively. Table 7, discussed later, displays figures about graduates' pursuit of higher education. All tables support Felicia's comment.

Table 5. 4-Year Graduation Rate (2015) Cartfield

<b>CARTFIELD Student Group</b>	<b># in Cohort</b>	<b>% Graduated</b>	<b>% Still in School</b>	<b>% H.S. Equiv.</b>	<b>% Dropped Out</b>	<b>% Permanently Excluded</b>
All Students	273	87.5	7.7	1.1	3.7	0.0
ELL	25	56.0	32.0	0.0	12.0	0.0
Low income	97	80.4	12.4	0.0	7.2	0.0
Afr. Amer./Black	27	85.2	7.4	0.0	7.4	0.0
Asian	20	90.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	47	72.3	19.1	0.0	8.5	0.0
White	156	93.6	3.2	1.9	1.3	0.0
Multi-race, Non- Hisp./Lat.	23	78.3	13.0	0.0	8.7	0.0

Table 6. 4-Year Graduation Rate (2015) Statewide

STATE Student Group	# in Cohort	% Graduated	% Still in School	% H.S. Equiv.	% Dropped Out	% Permanently Excluded
All Students	72474	87.3	5.6	0.9	5.1	0.0
ELL	4905	64.0	14.3	0.4	14.1	0.0
Low income	31301	78.2	8.9	1.3	9.5	0.0
Afr. Amer./Black	6468	77.5	11.3	0.8	7.7	0.1
Asian	4135	92.4	3.8	0.5	2.2	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	11040	72.2	10.4	1.3	12.8	0.0
White	49001	91.6	3.9	0.8	3.2	0.0
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	1555	85.9	6.0	1.4	6.1	0.0

These statistics showcase what I call a *disguised* achievement gap. Because various students of color subgroups are reflective of state averages for the subgroup- an acceptable level- the achievement gap goes unnoticed and unaddressed. Little attention is played to the achievement gap that exists between white students (who are excelling well beyond state averages) and their peers of color. And while the district may not be hurting students of color in comparison to their peers of color state-wide, in a district where white students are surpassing state averages, it has the potential to serve students of color in the same way. So why hasn't it? Bridget displays a similar "acceptable level" attitude in her interview, noting, "kids of all races in Cartfield are at a much better starting off point in terms of quality of education and racial tensions, considering what is happening in underperforming schools in poorer, urban areas throughout the country" (Bridget, informal conversation, 3-11-15). But if white students are *excelling* in the district, (one that is ranked in the top 8% of the nation's 21,000 public high schools) how is average acceptable?

In defining a "good" school system, Dan references the graduation rates, understandably given that Cartfield's graduation rates are comparable to state averages

for *all* students. However, with closer examination, noteworthy is that Cartfield students who comprise the English Language Learners (ELL) and Multi-race, non-Hispanic/Latino subcategories graduate at considerably lower rates- 8% and 7.6% respectively than the statewide average of students in these subgroups. And while the percentage of Latinos who graduate from Cartfield Regional High School (72.3%) is comparable to the state average (72.2%), Felicia is correct in calling attention to this subgroup. Latinos, with the exception of ELLs, are the population least likely to graduate, and in the district, the group that is the least likely to attend college (Table 7). What is striking is that 87.1% of white CRHS graduates attend college which is significantly higher than the 77.8% state-wide average of white students. The data from these tables show that while students of color may not be performing poorer than their peers of color in other districts, Cartfield's white students are performing at a higher level in comparison to other whites in the state, showing that there is a larger achievement disparity in Cartfield than the state-wide average.

Table 7: Graduates' Pursuit of Higher Education (Cartfield District & Statewide)

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b># High School Graduates</b>	<b># Attending Coll./Univ.</b>	<b>% Attending Coll./Univ.</b>	<b>% Private Four- Yr</b>	<b>% Public Two- Yr</b>	<b>% Public Four- Yr</b>	<b>% Community College</b>	<b>% State University</b>	<b>% Flagship campus Univ. of State.</b>
<a href="#">Cartfield</a>	237	206	86.9	46.1	23.3	30.6	21.8	2.4	21.8
ELL	8								
Low Income	76	61	80.3	23.0	44.3	32.8	41.0	4.9	23.0
Afr.Amer/Black	15	13	86.7	30.8	15.4	53.8	15.4	15.4	23.1
Asian	29	27	93.1	48.1	33.3	18.5	33.3	0.0	14.8
Hispanic/Latino	26	20	76.9	40.0	40.0	20.0	30.0	5.0	15.0
Multi-race, non- hisp/Lat.	20	18	90.0	38.9	38.9	22.2	38.9	0.0	22.2
White	147	128	87.1	49.2	17.2	33.6	16.4	1.6	24.2
<b>STATE</b>	<b># High School Graduates</b>	<b># Attending Coll./Univ.</b>	<b>% Attending Coll./Univ.</b>	<b>% Private Four- Yr</b>	<b>% Public Two- Yr</b>	<b>% Public Four- Yr</b>	<b>% Community College</b>	<b>% State University</b>	<b>% Flagship campus Univ. of State</b>
<a href="#">State Totals</a>	65,540	49,924	76.2	34.9	28.2	36.8	27.1	12.1	14.4
ELL	3748	2357	62.9	17.5	59.6	22.4	58.0	6.7	13.9
Low Income	25,832	16,889	65.4	22.6	28.8	28.3	47.3	11.3	13.6
Afr.Amer/Black	5572	4143	74.4	28.4	42.9	28.3	41.4	11.4	14.2
Asian	3868	3288	85.0	41.0	17.5	41.5	16.8	6.1	26.2
Hispanic/Latino	8178	5272	64.5	20.3	58.0	21.3	56.5	9.1	9.6
Multi-race, non- hisp/Lat.	1271	957	75.3	36.6	30.5	32.8	29.4	11.7	13.4
White	46,446	36,128	77.8	37.2	23.0	39.7	22.0	13.2	14.1

*\*Note: Results are not reported for higher education enrollments of fewer than 15.*

At the public radio forum held on the town common on August 21, 2014, two females of color also from Felicia's graduating class spoke about their experiences at the Cartfield high school. Their accounts provide further detail as to how these achievement disparities play out.

When the radio forum host asked whether there is a racial divide among students at the high school, one of the young women, Melinda, alluded to the segregation in course levels due to tracking. She noted, "I've been in classrooms where I've been like 'oh my gosh I am the only black person in this honors class'" (Melinda, radio forum 8-

21-14). The young women also described the racial separation in social situations such as the cafeteria; not an uncommon phenomenon (Tatum, 1997). Students sit together based on their social groups which are determined by activities (sports, the arts) and as Melinda shared, is often divided by race. Victoria agrees, calling it a kind of “racism and classism thing” but dismisses it as an ordinary aspect of high school stating:

you can kind of pick it apart- it’s like one of those things in high schools where you see different people and you can tell- it’s like the stereotypical jocks, or you can kind of tell. Being a student my four years there, that’s what I felt never changed throughout (Victoria, radio forum 8-21-14).

The radio hosts continued by asking the young women if they see the racial divide they described as being racism. Melinda responded by making the connection between the academic experience of students and their social experiences. She noted that often students socialize with the people in their classes, and because the classes are segregated racially, it contributes to the social segregation. Students of color tend to have classes together, and white students tend to have classes together. Because these racial groups know each other from classes, they’re likely to sit with each other at lunch in the cafeteria, for example. Melinda goes on to explain how this is institutionalized, looking back to her experience in elementary school.

I remember in elementary school being put back in the reading classes and now English is one of my best subjects. .. but when I was younger I was constantly kept back like “oh we’re not going to challenge you like all the other students, we’re going to leave you behind.” So I feel like when you’re young and you start getting put in these lower classes, as you start to grow up, you kind of start to fall behind. You start to be with these people and they tend to be people who look just like you. I don’t think it’s intentionally the students’ fault that we have this gap, but it’s kind of something that we just grow without realizing, and when we do realize, it it’s kind of like, oh, what do I do to get out of this. (Melinda, radio forum, 8-21-14).

The segregation Melinda described in elementary school continued for the young women in high school as well. Victoria noted that numerous times when she had wanted to take an honors level class, teachers encouraged her to try a lower-level course because it would be easier for her (fieldnotes, 8-21-14). Melinda agreed:

Yes! I have had many incidents with teachers before, in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade where I have wanted to do a challenging class and I had approached the teacher before and she was like “I don’t think you should do that” for an honors class. And it hurts some times because at the moment you don’t really know what your ability is, and how far you can push yourself. I can’t speak for other people but there have been many stories of people who have had teachers or guidance counselors say ‘I think you should try this, because it’s going to be easier for you’ (Melinda, radio forum, 8-21-14)

Both young women expressed that moving forward, they hoped the high school staff would create a culture where students of color are encouraged to be in the higher level courses. As it stands, they noted many of their peers of color look at the higher level courses and cannot envision themselves in those classes, perhaps because they do not see, as Victoria points out, *people who look just like them*.

### **Parents: Strong Schools for Whom?**

This discrepancy between how the district presents, and what actually takes place is not limited to those who go to school each day (employees and students). Parents of color and white parents alike expressed concerns about the varying educational experiences of Cartfield’s students. While the schools have well served her children, Beth explained she has been disappointed by certain elements.

Beth: I was seeing my oldest child coming home to me with not the kind of awareness I’d like her to have. She’d come home with more of the celebration of civil rights movement, and thinking, and really believing that the fight is over and that everyone has equal opportunity. And I think

that really misses a lot of some of the subtleties that are in place in everyday interactions, and also the realities born out of statistics like stop and frisk laws.

Katie: When did you start noticing that?

Beth: Probably pretty early on, like 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (interview, 1-20-16).

For Beth, the district does not adequately carry out the multicultural component of its mission, but rather oversimplifies and implements an approach that reflects more of a “heroes and holidays” interpretation of multicultural education (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Since being exposed to Diane Sherry’s story, Bridget started questioning the common assumptions about the strength of the school system. “I don’t know that anything in the schools is happening that is going to hurt my [biracial] child, but I am trying to pay more attention to why everyone thinks the schools are so great” (Bridget, Interview 1-28-16). Thalia, a parent of color to three students enrolled in the district schools echoed this sentiment, though described it differently than Bridget. She expressed that she feels it her responsibility to keep close watch on the material her children of color are learning, and how they are instructed. She noted:

I have had experiences where we need to pay attention to what books are in the classroom for students; how are the teachers teaching; what’s missing, all that takes a lot of participation and involvement, and we trust in people to do the right thing. But, I don’t know if we’re not harming kids (Thalia, interview, 1-10-16).

Robert is a former employee, and parent of two [white] children who attended and graduated from the school district. When asked to describe the school system Robert responded, “I think for the most part it’s fabulous for academically competent or gifted white middle class students- I think for that group, the schools probably do a better job than most private schools.” Here Robert described what test score, graduation rate, and college enrollment statistical data reflect. He went on crediting the well-intended



administrators, stating “...the school system has *wanted* to be more inclusive and serve all of its students” but then explains that the district “has never quite gotten outside the expectation of the dominant white middle and upper class families in town that this is their school system and it should serve their children” (Robert, interview, 12-18-15). Robert alludes to the same disconnect that the former employees of color referenced, and the students of color illustrated- the discrepancy between the district’s stated mission, and what plays out. Robert noted the schools are *fabulous* for white middle class students, and Thalia fears the potential *harm* the school experience causes students of color. Mae also echoes these sentiments, and believes the district is “working for the privileged class” (Mae, interview, 1-5-2016).

This section directs readers’ attention to the various factors that problematize the “strong school” reputation surrounding the schools. Community members including district alumnae, current and former parents, and former employees illustrate the discrepancy between the experiences of white students and students of color in Cartfield, thus provoking the question, strong schools for whom?

### **The Cartfield School District: Inadequate Response to Racial Inequities**

Together, the descriptions of various community members’ experiences within the school district counter the strong school narrative. In addition to sustaining the varying forms of racism- from overt racist attacks, to the day-to-day effects of systemic racism in the form of racial inequities, data show that people of color (and their allies) also endured the (often) inadequate response to address it. In general, they feel a sense of apathy from district leaders, and a lack of trust in the district’s leadership to adequately address race-related issues.

As noted, on February 10, 2014 Ms. Sherry made a first statement to the Cartfield Regional High School students and staff to describe her attacks. On March 25, 2014 she went before the Regional School Committee members where she publicly disclosed that her attacks worsened over time, and described the district's response to them as "anemic". She noted:

the sluggish response of the school administrators leading up to this most recent attack is a sad indication that the need for racial consciousness and sensitivity is low on this administration's list of priorities. It speaks to a culture of racism that exists in this school about which there is persistent denial! (Diane Sherry, Address to the Cartfield Regional School Committee 3-25-14).

When they first heard of Sherry's attacks, school committee members and administrators responded with statements of support. Superintendent Jane Wyndym, in her response to Diane Sherry's statement admitted, "we have failed Diane" (3-25-14). On her blog, one school committee member noted "we need to address this together- teachers, parents, students and community members. The High School is not an island, but part of a larger community." Likewise, Principal Paul Williams noted, "our immediate charge is to rally around Diane, she is ours. She needs to know that now more than ever" and "I and the school have an obligation to everyone who works here... to keep them safe and make sure no harm comes to them. We didn't do so well on that front with Ms. Sherry" (*Chronicle Herald*, 3-22-14).

At the onset, the majority of the words were supportive in nature, yet the actions did not match. For example, the administrators hired a security guard to be stationed in Sherry's room to ensure her safety. Yet this employee was later dismissed when it was found that he had not been appropriately vetted during the hiring process; his criminal record had been not been investigated- a requirement in the state for employment in the

schools. In fact, anyone who plays any sort of role in the schools- substitute teachers, administrators, employees, parents who supervise school activities- is required to have a background check. This is a well-known fact, yet the district somehow overlooked this important detail. Ms. Sherry eventually left her position taking an unpaid leave of absence when she no longer felt safe. In the end she hired a lawyer and filed a lawsuit with the state which she later won. Yet because Sherry did not return to her job, the district lost another excellent teacher- one of the already few teachers of color none the less.

An editorial in the *Cartfield Times*, a local newspaper, stated that many believe the district did not do an adequate job in seeking resolution. “Critics say Williams and other school officials didn’t act swiftly enough to address the Sherry case...the troubles haven’t eased despite school meetings, rallies, increased security and the hiring of outside consultants” (*Cartfield Times*, 5-23-14, p. 4). Likewise, a letter to the editor shortly after Sherry officially resigned revealed that this was not the district’s first mishandling of a difficult situation:

Something terrible occurred at the Cartfield Regional High School. The victim went to school administrators to tell them what was happening. The administrators dragged their feet and failed to respond. The victim hired a lawyer to help out. The school hired its own lawyer... The victim’s complaints were discounted and attacks were launched on the victim’s lawyer by the school administrators and their lawyer.

This is all happening right now, in 2014, as issues surrounding Cartfield Regional teacher Diane Sherry play out in the Press.

It also happened in 2002. I was then the lawyer for a student at Cartfield Regional who was [*details omitted to maintain anonymity*] at the time... My client and his mother begged administrators for help, but were put off repeatedly...

History is sadly repeating itself in Cartfield where attacks on a victim and her lawyers distract the public from problems administrators failed to solve (letter to the editor, *Cartfield Times*, 11-21-14).

Teachers of color are not the only group that feel the effects of the district's inadequate attention to race-related issues. Felicia, the Latina high school senior, expressed a similar sense of frustration around the district's lack of response regarding discipline disparities between students of color and white students. When she spoke to school committee members on January 28, 2014 Felicia captured the ineffective nature of the approach commonly used by the district. She stated, "you don't need to make any more meetings or any more studies...you guys all know very well what is going on and you have chosen not to follow through and address it" (1-28-14). Months later, on April 8, 2014 Felicia returned to a school committee meeting where she noted the lack of progress:

I don't understand why that message was maybe confusing three months ago when I said it, but I haven't seen any progress. And as a student who lives this every day and who this actually affects, it's very frustrating to have people standing in front of me who say "you know" to the *Chronicle Herald* and to other media outlets... we seem to have to come back up here and say the same points over and over and over and over and I want to see some steps not just articles to the *Herald* about how much you care about our black and brown students (4-8-14).

Diane and Felicia are not unique in feeling that the district was apathetic in their response to race-related issues. And while Diane and Felicia's examples depict one side of the story, it is important to note that the district did make attempts to establish various district-wide initiatives to discuss issues of race and racism. However, as the next chapter will illustrate, these attempts often failed and served to worsen an already delicate situation.

## **Chapter Summary & Discussion**

This chapter contains first-hand accounts from people of color and white people about their experience with the existing racial inequities in the Cartfield school district. As students of color, former employees of color, former white employees, school committee members, and parents of color and white parents evidence, despite the “strong schools” reputation they uphold, Cartfield schools are not protected from racial inequities any more than racially diverse schools in urban settings.

The issues discussed herein are not unique to the Cartfield district, but rather representative of the larger historical, sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts in the nation. As is the case in most settings, white students perform better than the majority of their peers of color. In fact, the achievement gap between white students and their peers of color is often greater in places like Cartfield than it is in urban settings (Alson, 2003; Diamond, 2006). This chapter has pointed to some of the *in* school factors that contribute to this gap, and scholars have widely discussed such factors including discipline disparities and opportunity gaps (Farkas, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006); teachers of color and white teachers’ lack of encouragement for their students of color to take higher level courses (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Oakes, 2005; Planty et al., 2009); and lower enrollment rates in higher education (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Kao & Thompson, 2003). All of these cause detours on the road to success for students of color, forcing them to “recalculate” in order to find their way.

These inequities are reflective of the deeply rooted racism in the United States, carried out through systemic structures that have historically privileged white culture, and positioned white people as superior. Schools are only one of the multiple, interconnected

institutions that both exhibit, and are influenced by these values. The barriers caused by school practices such as tracking, or a school's approach to discipline, for example, have larger implications such as the school-to-prison pipeline, wherein school practices serve to criminalize marginalized students. Likewise, the trends of the educational system are reflected in other institutions as well. In the criminal justice system, for example, African Americans and Latinos comprised 58% of all prisoners in 2008, despite the fact that together they made up only about 25% of the US population.<sup>16</sup>

The current chapter acknowledges the existence of racism in the Cartfield district, thus allowing us to now shift the focus to uncovering the structures that work to sustain it, and the factors that help dismantle it (chapter V). As Melody Hobson notes in her TedTalk titled *Colorbrave*, “the first step to solving any problem is to not hide from it. And the first step to any form of action is awareness” (Hobson, 2014). While the instances of racial inequity described here are troublesome, it is the response to it (or as some say, lack thereof) that furthers the divide between those who are more racially literate than others. For this reason, I argue that studying the *out-of-school* factors that sustain *in-school* racial inequities is as important to examining the *in-school* factors. Borrowing the construct of *implementational spaces* from the field of language policy and planning, chapter V examines how participants respond to evidence of racial inequities in the Cartfield school district. Use of implementation spaces as a framework allows for an examination of how various community members' discourse and actions sustain racial inequities, and impact the district's ability to uphold its mission statement and ensure the academic achievement of every student.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>

## CHAPTER V

### COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO IN-SCHOOL RACIAL INEQUITIES

Chapter IV described the various forms of racial disparities that exist in the Cartfield school district, problematizing the strong schools narrative by asking *strong schools for whom?* This chapter examines the community members' response to racial inequities, and in doing so, looks at the out-of-school factors that help sustain/resist the in-school racial inequities. Findings reveal how Cartfield's community members perform racism- a phenomenon I am positioning as society's de facto policy (Gee & Ford, 2011)- and by doing so, how this jeopardizes the contents of the district's official policy- its mission statement. Extending the concept of *implementational spaces* used in the field of language policy and practice, this chapter shows how community members' discourse and behaviors often sustain the strong school narrative by dismissing opportunities for a closer examination of how the schools adequately serve- or don't- *every* student.

I begin this chapter with a presentation of the district's official policy- its mission statement- before explaining the parallels between language policy and practice (LPP) and racism. By presenting an excerpt from my data, I clarify and further justify the use of *implementational spaces* as an appropriate lens to examine community members' actions and behaviors surrounding issues of race and racism. The majority of the chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the findings which are organized into sections according to community actors: administrators, parents, school committee members, and finally, community group members. The chapter concludes with a summary and discussion.

### **A District's Mission Statement: Its Official Policy**

*Our mission is the academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism.* (Cartfield District Mission Statement, District website)

A district's mission statement acts as its official policy; it encapsulates a district's values and ultimately guides actors' choices and actions surrounding aspects like the hiring process, curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, among other decisions. The mission also serves to attract, or not, its stakeholders, be it parents who choose to enroll their students, or, as Mae and Diane illustrated in the previous chapter, its employees.

When a job candidate fills out an application for employment in Cartfield he/she is asked to write an essay which responds to the following prompt:

Our district is committed to "Becoming a Multicultural School System". We work to provide all students with an education that enables them to be contributing members of a multiethnic, multicultural society. We strive to ensure that our community of students, families and staff are learning, treated equitably, and share the job of creating a caring environment. Please describe any personal background, training, work or other experience that you feel demonstrates your ability to help us in achieving this goal.

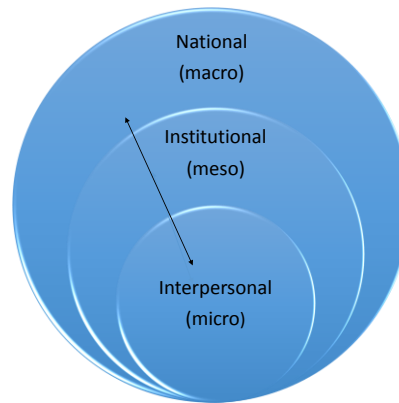
Ultimately this question, and the hiring team that reviews the applications, serve as gatekeepers to help select candidates who show a record of previous employment and life experiences that reflect and uphold values embraced by the district's mission. Yet as policy-related research shows, and as the data in this chapter exemplify, the intent behind a particular policy is often vastly different from how actors interpret and implement it.



### **Theoretical Framework: Implementational Spaces**

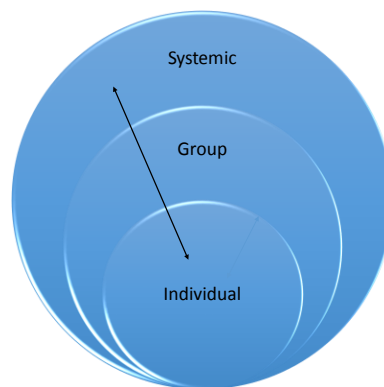
In the field of education language policy and practice (LPP) Hornberger and Johnson (2007) capture how policies change shape and form at each “institutional level” (527), highlighting the multiple layers in which a top-down policy can be interpreted, re-interpreted, and implemented. While policymakers may create a policy at the national level, the various actors (e.g. principals, classroom teachers) interpret and implement the policy differently based on the context and one’s individual beliefs or values. As such, scholars who study language policy and practice often apply an ethnographic approach in order to see across and between the various layers (see, for example, Sutton & Levinson, 2001). McCarty (2006), for example, advocates that research make connections between the details of “everyday discursive practices and their organization within larger cultural and historical frames” (p. xxii). Ricento and Hornberger (1996) best illustrate the multilayered nature of language policy through their use of the onion metaphor. They describe the multilayers of language policy and practice- the national, institutional and interpersonal layers. These layers (or what many deem as the macro, meso and micro levels) may be at the policy, community, and/or classroom levels- or even in a single social interaction (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Language Policy & Practice: The Onion Metaphor



The multilayers of the LPP onion mirror one of racism's attributes. As previously displayed in chapter II, Figure 1 illustrates racism's multilayers- individual, group and systemic. Figure 2 and Figure 1 illustrate how both LPP and racism are comprised of interconnected layers (national/institutional/interpersonal, and individual/group/systemic, respectively) which influence and are influenced by the other layers.

Figure 1. The Multilayers of Racism (Adapted from Marino & Mattheus, 2011)



Building on the onion metaphor, Hornberger (2002) described how the introduction of new, or shifts in existing language policies create opportunities where individuals or groups can insert their beliefs- their *ideologies*- around the purpose a particular language serves- and *implement* the policy accordingly; what Hornberger termed *ideological* and *implementational* spaces for education language policy and practice. (See Ricento & Hornberger's (1996), Cummins' (2005) and Valdiviezo (2009) for a few examples describing the role of teachers as policy makers in English language teaching, heritage language teaching, and bilingual intercultural education, respectively; and Menken & García's (2010) volume). While policies as official documents are powerful, it comes down to the individuals who interpret and implement them in their own contexts. As Dueñas (2015) summarizes, "while recognizing the power of policy, the concept of ideological and implementational spaces ultimately rests on the ingenuity of individuals, who actively and creatively seize those openings, transforming and expanding them" (23) at these different levels. Thus, implementational spaces in the field of LPP allow researchers to examine how actors use openings as a means to insert their agenda, and showcase their values. I position racism as a de facto policy, complex and multilayered, where the racist acts of one individual trickle out to group and systemic levels. In fact, all layers are interconnected and relational to the others. Thus, use of implementational spaces offers an appropriate lens to focus on how racism operates by way of community members' discourse and actions in micro instances, while also allowing to see the potential ripple effect micro level behaviors have on the larger system. Before moving on to the findings, I draw on evidence from my data to better illustrate these points.

### **An Illustrative Anecdote**

The Cartfield school district administrators often call on outside consultants to offer advice or run workshops on race-related initiatives. This can be beneficial, yet also detrimental if the consultant does not have a strong grasp of the sociocultural context of the school district. As Sarah points out, “they always want to pay the outsider who doesn’t understand the dynamics of the town” (Sarah, focus group, 2-2-16). As such, Sarah and other community members believe that administrators should vet consultants before he/she conducts a workshop. As is evidenced by the following example, failure to do so runs the risk of a negative outcome.

The district invited AJ Minster, a social justice activist and person of color who had previously worked with district high school students, to deliver a presentation to the entire middle school population to address racial issues and bullying. In October 2014, as part of his presentation to the entire 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade student body, AJ Minster asked students to close their eyes and participate in a visualization, in which he narrated a scene. Part of this visualization asked students “to visualize loved ones being shot by a gunman” (*Cartfield Times*, 1-16-15, p. 2.). Multiple students reacted negatively to the message (one even vomited), and were described as being “traumatized” by the presentation.

Students had not been prepared for the presentation, as teachers had not been told what the presentation would be about/how it would be conducted. Likewise, no notice had been sent home making parents/guardians aware of what would take place, or offering the option for a child not to participate. Upon hearing about the presentation from their student, parents responded with complaints to the district leaders. The

superintendent responded by inviting AJ Minster to give the same presentation to the parents, which occurred months after the middle school presentation (January 2015 and October 2014, respectively). The *Cartfield Times* captures the controversial visualization in fuller detail, which Minster presented at the parent/guardian forum the same way he had presented it to students in months prior.

About two hours into the presentation, Minster issued a warning to his audience prior to the section of the program that included the visualization exercise. “At this point in time, I told them I’m about to do something intense,” he said. He added that he invited anyone needing to leave the room to do so, which a few students and at least one teacher did during the October assembly.

Before asking audience members to close their eyes to begin the visualization, Minster told them he would do the exercise in the exact same way he did with the children.

The audience was instructed to imagine going to a community event being held at the high school. There, they were walked through the sensations, feelings and smells - everything from the feeling of holding a young loved one’s hand to the smell of enchiladas. They were also told they were with another, older loved one. “You love their sound you love their smell you love their words,” he said.

Inside the high school, he said to imagine that they and their two companions had ventured into an art classroom. Not long after, they’re told they notice a man running by. The reason? “They have guns! They have guns!” he said.

They are told that after some time and thoughts of not believing the situation, the gunman entered the room. A mother pleads for him not to shoot, and is shot, as are the two loved ones. “Call me names, tease me. Do it now,” he said, providing words for the imaginary shooter. “Are you hear ‘bang!’” he said.

The next scenario involved the audience imagining the funeral for the people who died during the shooting (*Cartfield Times*, 1-16-15, p. 2).

Some community members viewed AJ Minster as being at fault, whereas some held the administration accountable. Dan, for example, noted “[Minster] said something he shouldn’t have said” (interview, 4-1-16). In a focus group on 2-2-16, participants

discussed how the situation could have been prevented, holding the superintendent responsible.

Deb: Who vetted him?

Loretta: Can't just blame him [AJ Minster].

Sarah: No, and that's where the racism begins. Jane [the superintendent] wouldn't dare to ask him, because he's black.

Katie (author): Ask him what?

Loretta: Do you really know what you're doing? What do you understand about race? Like what's your analysis? Like how you gonna present?

Sarah: You need to give parents the option to opt out. Especially when you're gonna do something edgy. You need to tell parents.

Loretta: The administration was responsible for mishandling it.

A *Cartfield Times* article (10-24-14) published shortly after Minster's presentation to students noted, "AJ Minster said if the steps he suggested to school officials had been followed, it's unlikely the...presentation would have upset so many people" The same article featured Minster's email comment: "it seems that the district not sending out parent notifications prior to assemblies, not engaging the students in the pre-discussion materials, and not holding the community night the same day as the assembly contributed to the uproar." In response to this comment Jane Wyndym openly admitted that "the district" mishandled the situation stating, "I have acknowledged that mistakes were made on the part of the district." Noteworthy is Wyndym's use of the passive tense, as well as her pointing blame at "the district". As the leader of the district, Wyndym is at fault, yet avoids taking full responsibility for her actions by way of her discourse.

Use of *implementational spaces* as a lens through which to view how racism is performed extends the analysis of this anecdote further. The “mishandling” of this event ended with more than a few upset children and families. Interview and focus group participants captured the ripple effect it created- not just at the town level, but given the impact it has on race-related discussions, the systemic level. In the focus group Loretta expressed a concern about the silencing effect that might be a repercussion of Minster’s presentation (and the district’s poor execution of this event).

I think it hindered white peoples’ abilities to understand race issues because parents with children who have disabilities- autism and such- AJ Minster didn’t go over well with those kids and those parents. So those parents were like, ‘don’t talk to me about race, I don’t want to deal with it, you traumatized my kids.’ So I don’t think that it helped get any better (Loretta, 2-2-16)

Participants believed the superintendent’s mishandling of this situation reinforced an underlying belief in town that it is dangerous to talk about race, and it further silenced a conversation that needs to happen. Dan echoed these sentiments, suggesting that perhaps this episode might deter future presentations about similar topics:

I don’t think it was carefully done enough, which is not a good thing, but I also don’t want to go the other way where everyone clamps down and says ‘oh no, we don’t want to do that because something might happen’. And I think that’s bad. I would rather have a situation where you try and do things well all the time, obviously, and you try to be careful, but you realize no matter how careful you are mistakes are gonna happen. Don’t think like the world’s falling apart just because a mistake happens, just try to understand that, if you can’t tolerate any mistakes you’re gonna have a system that is so closed down you’re not going to like it. (Dan, interview, 4-1-16)

Had she properly vetted the speaker, the superintendent could have prepared principals/teachers who could have then held discussions with students/conducted lessons/written letters home to parents to make students/parents aware of what the talk

would cover. Parents/guardians could have requested their student not attend, should they choose, if they felt it would be too much for their student to handle. Instead, the result of not having properly vetted Minster led to an aftermath that made talking about race appear as something that should be avoided, when in fact, had the superintendent addressed the issue of race to begin with, the negative response might have been prevented. In essence, Jane Wyndym's silence furthered the silence around race and racism.

Use of implementational spaces as a framework assists in analyzing the ripple effect of an individual's action, discourse, or in this case, silence. Because they are interconnected, the ripple effect of one person's actions serves to sustain/resist racism at the individual, group and systemic levels.

### **Findings**

The themes that follow demonstrate how Cartfield's community members' performance of racism sustain/resist racial inequities in a district which claims its mission to be the *academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism*. Specifically, examining how administrators, parents, school committee members and community group members take up implementational spaces by way of discourse and actions shows how they uphold, or compromise the *academic achievement of every student* in a district that is comprised 40% students of color.



## **“I Don’t See Races”: Leaders’ Avoidance of Race**

### **Community Radio Forum**

Diane Sherry’s speech at the March 25, 2014 school committee meeting about her experiences with racism at the Cartfield Regional High School caused others to disclose similar information in both formal and informal capacities. One of the formally organized forums that was held was the August 21, 2014 community radio forum titled *Reading, Writing & Racism?* to which a variety of stakeholders were invited to be panelists. Among those invited were town and school leaders including the town manager, the school superintendent, the high school principal and the newly appointed climate and media specialist. The radio forum intended to examine the racial climate in the Cartfield schools by hearing from multiple stakeholders, administrators included. This was a moment where the Cartfield community would have a facilitated discussion about racism. Yet, the day before the forum was held, the leadership, who had originally agreed to be part of the discussion, declined the invitation.

The letter of explanation sent by climate and media specialist, Lesley Martin (a woman of color) stated

we have been committed to authenticity and determined to create an appropriate platform to do so, and not succumb to or encourage sensationalism, rhetoric, impatience or insensitivity to the variety of voices and needs within our community. My request to refrain from participating in what I felt would be a basic media tactic called race-baiting- was honored and supported by the administration (*Cartfield Times*, 8-29-14).

The absence of school and town officials was a missed opportunity for people in positions of power to hear stakeholders’ experiences with racism. Their absence allowed them to avoid admitting that the racist climate in Cartfield is real.

From her letter, we learn that Martin, a woman of color, equated the forum as an inauthentic and inappropriate platform to hear stakeholders' views, and that it promoted "sensationalism, rhetoric, impatience or insensitivity to the variety of voices and needs within our community." She likened it to a form of race baiting- defined by Merriam-Webster, as *the unfair use of statements about race to try to influence the actions or attitudes of a particular group of people*. Yet the forum hosted a variety of panelists, both in terms of racial background and position- former employees, students, and parents were among the panelists- both white people and people of color. Likewise, it was open to all members of the community. The goal of the forum was explorative, and the majority of questions focused on panelists' experience with racism in the schools, and the questions were asked in a non-assuming fashion. The fact that the four administrators- those that hold power in town and in the schools- did not attend the forum, shows that hearing a "variety of voices" was *not* their priority in this instance, which does not align with the district's social justice, multicultural oriented mission. Instead of attending, and listening to what people had to say, by way of their absence and the letter explaining their absence (*Cartfield Times*, 8-29-14), they disengaged from a conversation about race and racism. Had they attended, the administrators would have witnessed, and would have needed to have responded to the issues presented, an act that would have validated the stakeholders' concerns. Their absence instead ignored the issues, and maintained a colormute (Pollock, 2004) approach. So long as the district does not acknowledge racial inequities, it can continue to pretend they don't exist. In this way, the leadership invalidates the need for the forum, insinuating that racism doesn't exist and therefore a discussion about it is

unnecessary. The lack of participation from leaders serves to protect the false “strong schools” reputation at the cost of people of color.

### **United Cartfield**

In her response letter, Martin mentioned the creation of an “appropriate platform.” Here she might be referencing the newly formed initiative called United Cartfield, aimed to “advance community, collaboration, equity and inclusion in Cartfield” (United Cartfield website). It was created in response to the racial tensions in the schools during the spring of 2014. The August 22, 2014 article of *Cartfield Times* publicly introduces the group, and its headline “A Fresh Start: Cartfield Schools seek to Counter Racial Disharmony” insinuated that United Cartfield would address issues of racism. Both the town of Cartfield and the school district fund Martin’s salary, and she is charged with addressing climate on a town-wide scale and in the schools specifically. In a later article, Martin noted that “progress will be measured by listening to people and increasing inclusiveness and equity in Cartfield” (*Cartfield Times* 3-27-15). Noteworthy, however, is that since its inception in the summer of 2014 United Cartfield has missed several opportunities to explore racial tensions, and, as next paragraphs illustrate, has avoided them.

### **Town-wide Survey**

During the fall of 2014, Lesley Martin, in partnership with university professors created and disseminated a “public perception” survey that aimed to gather the views of Cartfield residents. The survey was available both online, and sent out by the superintendent, and paper copies were available in various public spaces. The survey was accessible to English and Spanish speakers and participants of all ages were encouraged

to complete the survey. While United Cartfield was described as “a collaboration between schools and the town to expand the opportunities for all residents and address racial issues in Cartfield” (7-3-15) nowhere on the survey- which was intended to “better understand the community’s needs” (Lesley Martin) were respondents asked to identify their race. Therefore, those conducting the analysis could not analyze for this variable. Only 456 people out of approximately 38,000 residents completed the survey. Subgroups for which an analysis was conducted included gender, age, occupation, education, area of occupation, first language, length of residence, and intention to move. In addition to the quantitative portion of the study, focus groups were also conducted. The chosen subgroups included business owners, college students, middle schoolers, and elders.

Noting the lack of attention towards race, I sent an email to one of the survey’s creators asking multiple questions, among them, why weren’t questions about race a part of the analysis? (personal email, 11-23-14). The response I received to this question was simply “not applicable” (personal email, 11-24-14). Despite the survey’s aim to “engage our culturally and socially diverse community in a dialogue about values, identity and perceived quality of life” (Cartfield Times, 7-3-15), participants’ racial demographics were ignored. While I attempted to meet with one of the designers of the survey by way of sending multiple emails, I received no response. The survey could have served as a forum where race-related information could have been sought and analyzed. Instead, the survey ignored this aspect, displaying a colorblind/colormute approach. This was an implementational space where information could have been sought and disseminated, and, if applicable, action steps could have been created in effort to help alter peoples’ perspectives or address their needs. Instead, the analysis was limited to non-race related

topics. For example, one finding reported that college students and community members feel isolated from each other, with the action step being as simple as implementing more tutoring programs in the schools in which college students can volunteer.

By not asking race-related survey questions, and not asking that survey respondents identify their race, the survey creators missed an opportunity to explore, and thus disseminate information about the racial climate in Cartfield. The survey creators, Lesley Martin included, avoided a discussion of racial climate by way of omitting race-related questions on the survey. This is again another missed opportunity to examine perceptions of people of color, both in town, and in the schools, as minors were also invited to complete the survey.

### **A Leader with a Colorblind Approach**

Cartfield United's leader Lesley Martin's avoidance of race-related issues goes beyond her lack of participation at the radio forum, and the absence of race on the survey she conducted. In various public statements she made, Lesley Martin's discourse reflected a colorblind stance. Martin's response to Diane Sherry's struggle was one example.

During the March 25, 2014 school committee meeting Ms. Sherry shared her testimony before the school committee members during public comment. The meeting was well attended- standing room only, perhaps 150 people were present, many of whom were Sherry supporters- both people of color and white people. When Sherry got to the microphone a dozen people stood behind her in solidarity as she read a lengthy (10 minute) statement (featured in full in Appendix F) to the school committee members, administrators, and for the local television station cameras. The atmosphere was charged.

People applauded and stood at the end of Sherry's statement. After she spoke, the chair of the school committee invited audience members to speak.

Lesley Martin was one of a dozen people who raised her hand to speak, and when it was her turn, she made the following remarks.

My name is Lesley Martin. I'm a member of the community, and a parent. After listening to this beautiful speech I think we have an opportunity before us. As I look around, there's diversity here, and we've all come to support from many socioeconomic backgrounds and colors. This is an opportunity; we have to take advantage of it now or never. No more lip service, no more ideas and just talking about what we can do down the road. It has to happen now. I'd like to ask all of us to consider what color we would be if we had no melanin or no skin. What's underneath- how we treat her- is how we treat our sister, our mother, our broth-. We have to look at it that way. It can't be this African American woman over here, and what do we do with her, and deal with racism; what do we do with one another? (School committee meeting, 3-25-14)

Lesley Martin saw Diane Sherry's experience with racism in the schools as an *opportunity* to come together as a community to support her. When Lesley Martin stated "It can't be this African American woman over here, and what do we do with her?" she openly acknowledged that Ms. Sherry's race impacts how she will be supported. Yet Ms. Martin's words also suggest that she believed in order to counter the racism Sherry experienced, that we must adopt a colorblind approach. She invited audience members to ignore skin color, suggesting that race doesn't matter because *underneath*, we are all the same. She encouraged the community "to consider what color we would be if we had no melanin or no skin" – essentially to disregard Ms. Sherry's race. Martin's phrase "we need to look at it that way" further asserted her position that colorblindness is the effective route to rally support for Diane Sherry. By doing so, she ignored the fact that race is socially constructed and that racism is rooted in a deeply historical context- a

history that cannot be erased by adopting a colorblind approach. Her statement posits that a colorblind approach assists our ability to show respect and support those who are of a different race than ourselves.

Noteworthy is the fact that Lesley Martin made these comments *before* she was appointed as the town's media and climate specialist. She was hired in August of the same year. Even after she was hired, Martin's discourse captured a colorblind approach. On November 20, 2014, Martin made another public comment during the school committee meeting, though at this point, she spoke as the town's climate and media specialist having been hired for the position four months earlier.

I don't know what I'm gonna say, and I don't know why I'm speaking, but I'm just gonna go with my heart. As I look at our community I don't see races and all that stuff, I see a human race, because racism is real...As a community if we don't stand together we're gonna all fall together...(School committee meeting, 11-20-14)

Her point is similar to that which she made in March: our races divide us and hinder our ability to unite; we are better off if we don't acknowledge our differences in terms of race. In her comment on 11-20-14, she advocated colorblindness as a means to show support for Diane Sherry, a woman of color. In doing so, Martin avoided overtly acknowledging that Diane was targeted because of her skin color.

The public comment portion of each school committee meeting is an implementational space, allowing individuals to voice their opinions, and perhaps insert their agendas about a particular topic. On multiple occasions Martin avoided the opportunity to acknowledge race during her public comments, just as she had done with the survey. In fact, she went to the other extreme and aligned herself to a colorblind approach as a person of color, and in doing so avoided acknowledging the racism Diane

Sherry experienced. Minutes after Sherry made her statement, Martin extinguished the possibility that racism exists in Cartfield's schools through her race-neutral discourse.

The creation of the climate & media specialist position, and the resulting development of *United Cartfield*, were reportedly derived out of the need to address racial tensions in town and in the schools. These developments served as two opportunities to acknowledge and address the racial inequities and racism that exist. Because of the manner in which these implementational spaces were taken up, what could have been seized as moments of opportunity to create a shift were actually used to reinforce false grand narratives and perpetuate the myth that race and racism is better left unmentioned. We see this colorblind/colormute trend repeatedly: the absence from school and community leaders (including Martin) at a racism-centered forum, the lack of inclusion of race on the town-wide survey, and Martin's colorblind discourse during the public comment portion of school committee meetings.

The implication for the misuse of these implementational spaces is detrimental on a number of levels. To begin, charging someone who openly admits she "doesn't see race" with "expand[ing] the opportunities for all residents and address[ing] racial issues in Cartfield" (*Cartfield Times*, 7-3-15) risks reinforcing the already colorblind mentality exhibited from numerous people in town. Because Martin is a woman of color, and furthermore a woman of color whose job description entails addressing racial climate, her act of aligning with a colorblind approach has potential to further perpetuate the existing inequities by ignoring race-related issues. Her words can be easily misinterpreted by those with little understanding, and support a false post-racial narrative. As a woman of color herself who says she does not see race, some people might hear Martin's words and



respond “the woman of color doesn’t see race, therefore racism doesn’t exist.” In her position as the town’s media and climate specialist, Martin’s discourse carries that much more weight. The approach she aligns with, and shares publicly, is one means of creating a culture around race and racism. For her to use the public comment portion of school committee meetings to display a colorblind approach not only deems it as acceptable, but reinforces colorblind discourse.

Those whose discourse reflects an awareness pick up on Martin’s discourse and note her colorblind stance. Robert is one of those people. In his interview, Robert relates Lesley Martin’s colorblind approach to the national context- a nation that post-Obama’s election adopted a “post-racial society” stance, claiming that the election of Barack Obama proves that racism was a thing of the past; of course, years later, society realized the falsity of this claim (Wise, 2012). Robert notes,

This is a person who the superintendent and the town manager have hired to help with racial equity and the response to Diane Sherry and all, and she advocates colorblindness. That’s a nation-wide thing, the whole thing about colorblind is the way we get to racial justice. I see the school system as having fallen somewhat into that (Robert, interview, 12-18-15).

Robert’s words reflect a sense of racial literacy—an ability to “critically examine and continually question how race and racism inform beliefs, interpretive frameworks, practices, cultures, and institutions” (Winans, 2010, p. 477) which assists him in his ability to “read” Lesley Martin’s words and notice that the district has attached to a colorblind approach, and the potential impact this might have on students of color. Yet if other people are not racially literate enough to critically examine Martin’s words, the discourse shared in school committee meetings can go unchallenged.

## **“I’ve Always Felt That I’ve Been Heard”:**

### **Parents’ (Re)clamation of the Strong Schools Narrative**

Data show that white parents and parents of color insert themselves and use their discourse (either intentionally or unintentionally) to influence teachers, administrators and the public. Their words have influential potential to shift, change or sustain district policy, and/or classroom practices or procedures. When Diane Sherry’s testimony jeopardized the strong schools narrative, parents responded. Janet Miller’s public comments at two different school committees illustrate how her words serve to reclaim the “strong school” narrative that serve her white children.

On June 24, 2014, at the final school committee meeting of the 2013-2014 academic year, Janet Miller was one of over a dozen community members to speak. The majority of the comments pertained to how the district had failed Diane Sherry, given that her situation had not yet been resolved or the racist attacks adequately addressed since they were brought to the administration’s attention months earlier. Yet as Janet Miller’s words exemplify, such comments were sprinkled with the occasional statement from those who defended the district.

I’m Janet Miller. I’m a resident of Cartfield. I have three children who’ve gone through the schools. I want to take a minute and just thank all of you for your public service. I appreciate- (some rumblings in the audience - she turns and asks if everyone’s ok before continuing) I appreciate what you do and the time you take away from your families and your personal lives, and the dedication and thought that you give to our schools, and our community, and the policies. I don’t think our schools are perfect, I think they’re far from that. My own experience has been that faculty and the administration have always been responsive. The path has not always been clear, but I’ve always felt that I’ve been heard, and there’s always been good and steady attempts to deal with the issues my children have had. I recognize that my experience is not everyone’s and I know that there’s a lot more work to be done, but I just wanted to come tonight and give voice

to my own experience, and also thank you and the administration and the faculty.

I think it takes a tremendous amount of dedication on a day-in and day-out basis. I am not an educator, and I'm happy I'm not an educator, but I respect the skills and the experience and I think that our schools are moving in the right direction. I do see progress. I do see policies. I see programs. I hear about the troubles in the [high] school but I also hear about the very tangible things that are being done to improve those, and I welcome Mr. Jones' comments about everyone needing to come together in this town, and on this committee, and in this school, and I ask that people do that. I think the time of the embattleness of what we've been experiencing needs to end. This year has been a very challenging year for all members of the community and the schools. I will say I hope we have a good summer and a productive and a thoughtful one. Thank you again. (School committee meeting, 6-24-14)

Here Janet Miller began by situating herself as a community member who has great knowledge of the schools given she has three children enrolled in the district. She showed her respect for the school committee members by acknowledging their service, and the time they volunteer for the cause. She went on to describe her positive experience as a white mother in the school district, claiming "I've always felt that I have been heard" and that there have been "good and steady attempts to deal with the issues my children have had." Noteworthy is that her children are white. And while she acknowledged that her experience might not reflect everyone's experience, she did not specify any particular group (e.g. people of color) either by naming such a group, or identifying herself as white. Upon realizing that Miller was praising the district, the audience (comprised of many of people of color and allies of Diane Sherry) began to make noises, as if to insinuate that it is not the place of a white woman to insert her positive narrative in this space. The contents of Janet Miller's narrative were in direct contrast to the majority of the statements made that evening. Janet Miller's discourse does not reflect a level of consciousness around her status as a white woman, and how her skin color, and that of

her children, might influence their in-school experience. Her discourse does not reflect a sense of racial literacy- a questioning as to how her white children's experience in Cartfield's schools might be impacted by their race. Failure to reflect on how skin color impacts peoples' experiences is not aligned with racially literate practices.

At one point Janet Miller stated the purpose of her comment was intended to "give voice" to her experience. Her word choice here is interesting, as often this idea of "giving voice" surrounds issues of representation of oppressed, or under-represented populations. As a white person in this context she did not fit this description, yet by using these words she positioned herself as having been silenced. At this particular school committee meeting her positive statement is unique in a sea of negative comments. After taking the time to thank and praise the administration and faculty, she mentioned she has seen progress regarding the recent tensions in the high school, and in claiming this, separated herself from the majority of the speakers that evening. She asked that people move on, stating "what we've been experiencing needs to end." Given she is a white woman who is pleased with the educational experience of her children we are to assume that she is not referring to the racism Diane Sherry experienced when she says "what we've been experiencing needs to end", but rather the tense aftermath that resulted from it. She reminded people that the summer is approaching, and by combining her comment "this year has been a very challenging year for all members of the community and the schools" with "I will say I hope we have a good summer and a productive and a thoughtful one" suggested that people should use the summer to prepare to come into a new school year putting the *challenging* year behind us, as if to say, let's move on. But as

one of the young women at the radio forum reminded listeners, you can't "move on" from racism:

You can't just forget that what happened last year just happened... it's not like racism just started last year... Those are events that happened many times. There are so many things that happen throughout our school every single year- before we were there, and it's gonna happen after we go... They [the school administrators] didn't create racism, therefore they're not going to take it away (Community Radio Forum, 8-21-14).

To summarize, Janet Miller used the public comment portion of the school committee meeting to share her experience. In her comment, Miller did not acknowledge the racist attacks on Diane Sherry. Instead, Miller emphasized the recognition of the "good things" that happen in the school and the importance of unity, coming together as what is important. This dismissal antagonized the attention to the racist attacks on Diane Sherry and positioned any discussion of Sherry's case as obstacle to unity and obstacle to the recognition of the good things that happened in school. She did not take into account her own white privilege, nor that of her children and how their race influences their experience. At the same time, by ignoring her race and how her race impacts her experiences, her discourse normalizes whiteness. Her words sustain the racial inequities present in the high-performing schools by ignoring the students who experience school differently than her white children.

The conversations did not cease with the arrival of the summer, but rather continued well into the fall and winter months. At the November 20, 2014 school committee meetings numerous community members presented a petition to the school committee. In short, it asked that the district meet and negotiate with Diane Sherry and her attorneys to resolve the issues contained in her formal complaint (for full copy of the petition please see Appendix G).

Janet Miller returned in the new school year at a November meeting. After sharing similar information as she did at the 6-24-14 meeting about the positive experience she and her children have had with the schools, she pleaded with the school committee members to disengage with conversations surrounding Diane Sherry's case.

As a parent and a tax payer and Cartfield resident I ask the school committee, our elected officials, please get back to the business of the schools and the school committee. Get back to supporting and collaborating with the current administration, the teachers, and the kids, and furthering the ongoing work that is going on in our schools. Thank you very much (11-20-14).

Her act of making the point that she is a taxpaying Cartfield resident set herself apart from those who rent in Cartfield, perhaps to insinuate that as a taxpayer, her opinion carries more value. Her words "get back" in the above statement insinuated that Diane Sherry's case does not deserve the attention of the school committee or the elected officials; that this work does not constitute business that they should address, and that doing so goes against "supporting and collaborating with the current administration, the teachers, and the kids." Janet's comment went against the content of the petition which was read prior and made the point that "the racist attacks that plague [Diane Sherry] harm all of us as well".

### **Parents' Influence**

Janet Miller is not a lone example of parents who voice their opinions and push their agendas, knowingly or not. In their interviews, both Beth and Robert noted the influential role parents play in the district, noting that class and race impact the influence a particular parent might possess.

Beth believes that those with “time and money” have the capacity to be more involved in the schools, and therefore have more influence in decision-making. She notes,

Where we’re situated as a family, and within our school, we have a lot of friends who are sort of... who come from the places in Cartfield where there is a lot of money and wealth, and then the friends who are in much more dire situations than we are. And I think the voices of power lie where the money is. And there’s a lot of involvement in the schools, I think, by the people who may have more time and money (Beth, interview, 1-20-16)

Robert makes a similar comment, but focuses his analysis on race, as opposed to class.

He highlights what happens when white parents do not consider students of color.

I think a lot of what I am describing has been driven by many many micro-interactions between parents and teachers, and parents and principals. And most of it has not been a movement or an organization. It’s been, you know, who feels most comfortable in the schools?... white middle class parents... Who is most articulate and most willing to advocate for their children? white middle class parents... whose got the most time?

So you’re a classroom teacher and over the course of the last month 8 white parents have shown up to say ‘hey I love that thing you did that works for my child’, with no attention to whether it worked for anybody else, or ‘hey my child is ready to do something more in math, what are you gonna do about that?’ As a teacher when you get those questions and comments week in and week out... Somebody said it doesn’t matter what the principal or superintendent says, you know, you have to live with these children and these parents... and they can make your life miserable. So it drives things in a certain direction. Principals and superintendents and school committee members are all under those same pressures, and while parents of color do some advocacy and can sometimes ramp up more rage about something, it tends to be episodic, it tends not to be sustained, and it doesn’t tend to have the same cumulative effect over time. (Robert, interview, 12-18-15)

It is common for white, middle class parents to insert themselves into implementational spaces at the classroom, school, and town-wide level. And as Beth and Robert highlight, their discourse carries weight and often works in favor of their white students, without considering the experiences of those who are of different races or socioeconomic levels.

A simple comment about what works well for a white parent's child ripples to the classroom level, school level, district level, and beyond.

**“The More We Talk About Race, the Better”:  
School Committee Members’ Dis/Comfort with Race**

**Equity and Excellence in Cartfield Schools**

In late spring of 2014 the School Committee created the Equity & Excellence in Cartfield's Schools (EECS) task force. Partly in response to the racist attacks toward Diane Sherry, a school committee member of color initiated the EECS in order to examine equity issues in the district's schools. The task force was unique from other school committee subcommittees in that it was open to all community members, and therefore attracted a combination of school personnel, school committee members, former district employees, and parents. In its debut months the group consisted of between 30 and 40 members, but as time progressed those numbers decreased to 15-25 people at the monthly meetings, and even now, at the time of writing, an average of 8 to 12 people regularly attend.

Those involved in the taskforce develop and present recommendations surrounding issues of equity in the schools to the District and the School Committee. The EECS was composed of three subgroups, including a group that looked at structures in schools (e.g. tracking, curriculum), one that examined district trends of discipline disparities, and another that explored school racial climate. While it was not required, most EECS members served on one of these subgroups. I became part of the group that examined school racial climate- the School Climate Taskforce (SCT).



### **School Climate Taskforce**

After multiple meetings during its nascent phase, the SCT found its rhythm both in terms of meeting times (generally once or twice per month) and members. While the group started off with over 10 people, a few months in there were a committed handful who attended regularly, many of which I ended up interviewing (e.g Mae, Bridget, Beth, Marie, Julia). The majority of the members were women, with the exception of one male who later stopped participating due to health issues. There was a comparable number of people of color and whites. Also important to note is that two of the members held PhDs, and an additional two, including myself, were also working towards that degree, which influenced and resulted in the research-oriented nature of the group's approach.

As a result of numerous meetings and discussions, the SCT narrowed their focus, and placed their efforts towards developing a policy that would allow community members to conduct an ongoing examination of the racial climate in the district's schools. Group members wanted to know what aspects of school culture "allowed" a teacher of color (Diane Sherry) to be targeted because of her race on more than one occasion. SCT members wanted the district to take more initiative in exploring school culture- the recurring trends and patterns over time. In the later months of 2014 and the early months of 2015, the SCT developed a policy that aimed to do this. One of the policy's elements that group members frequently contemplated was whether to limit the policy's focus to race, or include language that would allow the exploration of other inequities (e.g. those caused by sex, gender identity, ability, etc.). After lengthy discussions, the group agreed that the focus on race was most necessary at the time of the policy's development, and if

there were additional issues that needed to be addressed, then additional policies could be created. The group felt strongly that the policy needed to focus solely on racial climate.

On April 8, 2015 SCT members presented the policy to the EECS where it was voted on and passed. But the work was just beginning, and the language that was passed by the EECS would eventually be redrafted multiple times by the policy subcommittee of the School Committee. SCT members met with the policy subcommittee of the School Committee three times, attended two School Committee meetings, and exchanged countless emails before the policy would be voted on and passed on November 10, 2015.

On June 2, 2015, SCT members provided a 10 minute powerpoint presentation that served to introduce the policy; explain the rationale for it; educate school committee members about its components including qualitative research, participatory action research, and institutional review board approved research (although the IRB approved research clause was later eliminated from the policy). The language of the *School climate data collection and analysis policy* that passed on November 10, 2015 reads as follows:

*The Cartfield Regional School Districts will administer ongoing research that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in an effort to explore issues related to the Cartfield schools environment and community, including issues of racial, multicultural and social justice climate. The School Committee directs the Superintendent, or his or her designee, to utilize Participatory Action Research, or a similar methodology, which reflects the input of stakeholders who experience the school culture firsthand, and thus who are most knowledgeable about the particular context (e.g. teachers, students, staff, administrators, parents, alumni). Data collection methods may include (though are not limited to) any combination of the following: interviews, focus groups, observations, discourse/text analysis, mapping, photovoice and surveys. The Superintendent will involve stakeholders in the data collection, analysis and dissemination stages of the research within the framework of state and federal regulations and contractual obligations. Data and research will be presented on an annual basis.*

## **Policy Creation Discussion: Implementational Spaces for Promoting Racial Literacy**

The discussions that resulted from the policy creation and approval process created numerous opportunities for participants to insert themselves into these implementational spaces and exhibit their racial literacy (Guinier, 2004; Winans, 2010; Stevenson, 2014). It allowed some people (e.g. myself and Mae) to promote a policy that intended to expose the racial inequities in the district. At the beginning of the School Committee meeting on November 10, 2015, as a member of the EECS and SCT, I made the following statement during public comment:

As stated on the agenda, tonight you will be reviewing, discussing and voting on the proposed policy first presented to you last spring by the SCT, a subcommittee of the Equity & Excellence in Cartfield's Schools task force. Since then we have met numerous times with the policy subcommittee and even individually with some of you to answer questions and clarify your concerns. Thank you to those who met and corresponded with us.

This evening the district finds itself at a crossroads. The decision you make this evening will send a message about the direction the district is headed in regards to its commitment to explore and address racial inequity in its schools- and to act on its own mission statement which ensures "the academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism."

Meritocracy and colorblindness are some of the societal structures in place that maintain racial inequities. Cartfield schools are not apart from these forces that maintain racial inequity in its schools. Your job now, as representatives to our community, is to decide what your role will be in dismantling the racial inequity that exists. Will you embrace this policy and allow the stakeholders- those who experience the strengths and weaknesses of the school system on a daily basis- to identify the true issues that sustain our racial inequities so that they we can then address these issues? Or will you decline the opportunity to grow and improve ourselves, and better align ourselves with the district's mission? ... We ask you, as our representatives, to vote in favor of this policy. A policy that will allow to address issues of racial inequity in the district. A policy that will embrace a level of transparency about the racial inequities in our schools.

Here I use the public space to assert some of my views about the school district: that up until now, the district has failed to act in accordance to its multicultural-focused mission

statement. I stated that the “district is at a crossroads,” implying that School Committee members’ decision to vote for or against the proposed policy will show community members how committed the district is in exploring issues of racial inequities. I went on to express that Cartfield schools are not excused from the “societal structures... that maintain racial inequities” and asked the members to think about what their vote means for the district in regards to how it takes up examining, and speaking to issues of racial inequities. My concluding thought “embrace a level of transparency about the racial inequities in our schools” insinuated that the district has not done an adequate job around these issues.

About 45 minutes into the November 10, 2015 meeting, the school committee members began their discussion about the proposed policy’s language. The dialog that unfolded displayed the varying perspectives held by school committee members, and allowed some meeting participants to draw on, and showcase their racial literacy as debates about the particular wording of the policy ensued.

As the policy was introduced, Genevieve, a white member of the school committee who also sits on the EECS, summarized the goal of the policy:

The whole goal of this thing is for us to empower and help the high school and middle school to understand, and for us to also better understand, and for everyone in the community to understand better, what are the various dimensions of the climate at our schools as they are experienced by our students, administrators, students, staff & families? So hopefully at the end of the day, this is going to help us get there. We will have ongoing information about what is happening and what is the lived experience of everybody so that we can understand what type of interventions we can design altogether to improve and build on what’s working.

Noteworthy is that Genevieve's introductory comment does not acknowledge the policy's focus on racial climate, or highlight that the goal is to gain a better understanding of "the lived experience" of people of color, but rather "everybody" as she notes. It wasn't until another school committee member, Dan, advocated to change the language around the phrase "including issues of racial, multicultural and social justice climate" that Genevieve brings up the importance of emphasizing race.

After four or five school committee members had spoken, Dan took his turn. He made a few comments about the language within the policy suggesting, for example, to strike the word *research* and replace it with *data collection* and *analysis*. After suggesting a few additional word changes, he advocates for expanding the purpose of the policy, noting, "where it says 'including issues of racial, multicultural...' I would strike *issues of* and just have it say *racial, multicultural, gender, sexual orientation, and bullying and social justice*." At that moment, Jane Wyndym (the superintendent) notes, "I would add gender identity as well." In making their suggestions, Dan and Jane shifted the policy from one that focused on racial climate in the schools, to one that looked at school climate in general. Upon hearing these comments, I stood up from my chair in the audience and asked the moderator quietly if I could make a comment. He denied me the opportunity at first, indicating that he wants to hear from other school committee members. When I was granted permission to speak, I approached the public comment microphone and clarified:

I want to speak back to some of the recommendations that were made, thank you very much. The policy you see before you is the result of numerous months of conversation, specifically about the language. And

we've been back and forth both as the SCT and again with the EECS about what to include when we look at the climate, and we did really wanted to include the multicultural, the multilingual, and multiracial aspects of our climate, and wanted to use this as a way to explore that [those elements]. But if other issues arise, another policy could be created to look at issues of homophobia or whatever. So that's where we are coming from on that. (Katie (author of this dissertation), white woman, school committee meeting 11-10-15)

Mae also takes the opportunity to speak back to Dan's suggestion, but in a more direct fashion.

To the point that Katie just made in response to Dan's additional language- as an anti-racism educator I understand in white-dominated systems there is a tendency to ignore the racial, multicultural aspects of an environment, and focus more on gender, and homophobic aspects and bullying aspects. And those are important aspects to deal with. But what we know in society and what we've learned over centuries is that our racial understanding, our multicultural understanding begins at a young age- younger than elementary school in fact. So by the time a child get to elementary school they're beginning to notice more and more skin color difference and what that means and how that impacts students. So using the language *racial* and *multicultural* and *social justice* is purposeful, so that we keep a focus on issues that will make a difference in students' lives- both throughout their school and into the future. (Mae, woman of color, school committee meeting 11-10-15)

Mae's words focused more on race than did mine. Mae positions herself as an anti-racism educator and her comment served to do just that- educate the school committee members (7 of 9 who identify as white) about the age that students begin to notice and observe race, and what it means to have white skin or black skin or brown skin. She reminded them that it is the students who will most benefit from this policy- both during their time in the Cartfield schools, and beyond. After Mae and I (Katie) spoke, Genevieve echoed their thoughts saying,

I would advocate that the phrase 'including issues of racial, multicultural and social justice climate' stay in. I think that one of the things that we do

want to focus on is understanding more about the racial climate in our schools, and I also think that the more we say the word ‘race,’ and talk about race, and get comfortable with talking about race, the better. And so I think they should stay in as an absolute priority and focus of this work. Not to say that it is the only focus, but it is a priority and focus. (Genevieve, school committee meeting, 11-10-15).

Here Genevieve acknowledged the district’s challenges in talking about race, and peoples’ discomfort with it. She pushed that the policy remain to focus on race, perhaps a reflection of the conversations she had been part of in the EECS where it was debated.

In the microcosm of a Cartfield school committee meeting, we see a larger societal debate play out- *Black Lives Matter* versus *All Lives Matter*. This section illustrates how various actors adopt an “all students matter” approach, and in doing so, suggest there isn’t the need to focus solely on racial inequities. Similar to how the “all lives matter” argument undermines those who the *Black Lives Matter* movement most intends to impact, the “all students matter” narrative discounts the experiences of students of color, and works to sustain the racial inequities in the schools.

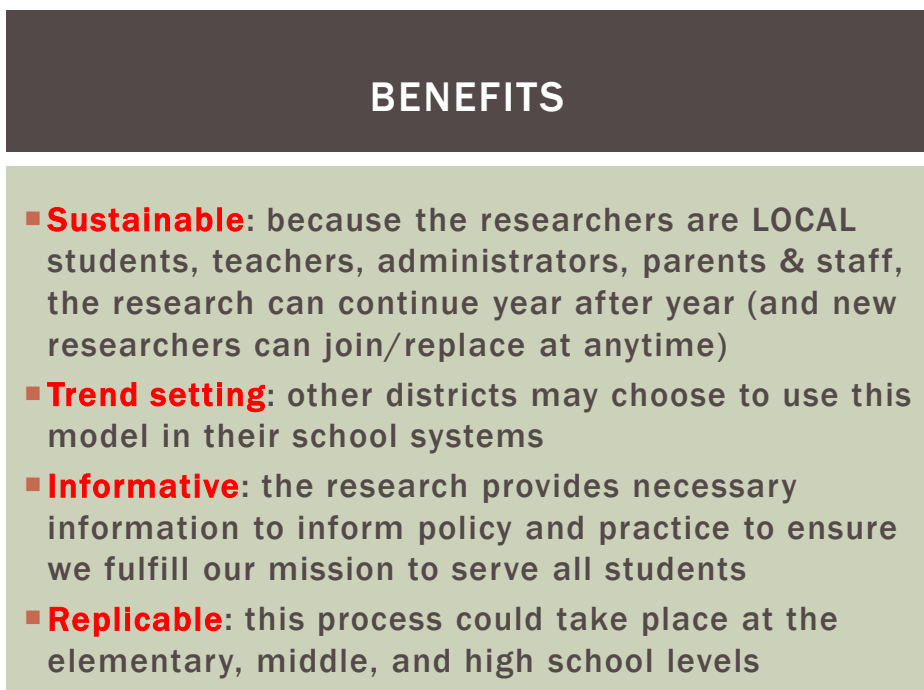
### **“The Revolution is Trying to Find a Way to Work from Within”: Group Members’ Persistent Advocacy**

Genevieve’s words, “the more we say the word ‘race’ and talk about race, and get comfortable with talking about race, the better” serve more function than simply advocating in favor of the policy up for discussion. They label a larger, systemic issue- the fact that the majority of the school committee members do not talk about issues of race. Their collective colormuteness (Pollock, 2004) deters their ability to contemplate and discuss how the policies they edit, contemplate or approve might impact students of

color. Few school committee members exhibit the level of racial literacy that would provoke them to reflect on how their decisions as policy-makers impact students of color.

Coming from a school committee member, these words are even more powerful, as they surface one of the roadblocks that community member participants experience in working with the district- the need to slyly push their anti-racist agenda and package it in a fashion that appeals to the district. The SCT shows evidence of doing this during their June 2, 2015 presentation. Their last slide (Figure 3), for example, outlines the benefits that would come with implementing the proposed policy.

Figure 3. Presentation Slide



The slide features a dark brown header with the word "BENEFITS" in white, bold, uppercase letters. Below the header is a light green rectangular area containing a bulleted list of four items. Each item starts with a red square bullet point followed by a bolded term and a colon, then a description. The text is in a dark grey font.

- **Sustainable:** because the researchers are LOCAL students, teachers, administrators, parents & staff, the research can continue year after year (and new researchers can join/replace at anytime)
- **Trend setting:** other districts may choose to use this model in their school systems
- **Informative:** the research provides necessary information to inform policy and practice to ensure we fulfill our mission to serve all students
- **Replicable:** this process could take place at the elementary, middle, and high school levels

This slide is representative of the approach SCT members adopted in their presentation: a sales pitch of sorts- a means to *convince* school committee members of the proposed policy's importance. As was evidenced by the presentation slides, the policy was not packaged as a means to explore racial inequities, but rather *school culture*. Only when the



actual language of the policy was revealed did SCT members focus on race. The SCT members were responding to what they know about the district and its (low) commitment towards race-related issues.

The policy took nine months to get approved, which was noted to be rapid in comparison to the majority of the policies. It moved along only as a result of the pressure the SCT placed on the school committee members. SCT members kept it alive. They made sure it was on meeting agendas. They emailed and met individually with willing school committee members to discuss the policy's content and clarify or address any concerns. This pressure, an essential element to getting the policy passed, was noted when the school committee discussed it on November 10, 2015. Judy, a white school committee member who also served on the policy subcommittee noted, "this is the only policy we've discussed since March, which is problematic considering we have a huge number of policies to address." Judy's comment reveals the attention SCT's proposed policy had received was problematic, and that had the SCT members not pushed it as an urgent matter, it might have not received the attention it deserved. In other words, the school committee did not see its urgency; another indication of the district's lack of priority towards addressing race-related issues.

In her interview Julia, a SCT member, expressed that for the work to get done, there's a level of teamwork and follow through that is required. She references the subgroup of the EECS that examines discipline disparities, noting "months ago [there was a] desire for policy change... and it was presented and it got dropped- and nothing happened by the school committee, no one picked it up again" (Interview, 1-6-16). Julia noted the level of commitment that is needed from EECS group members in order to

follow through with the School Committee members. The stamina and time required to ensure the SCT's proposed policy passed was almost a part-time job in itself. If group members had not been committed to addressing racial inequities, it would not have kept the necessary momentum nor would it have remained the top item on the policy subcommittee's agenda.

In her interview Beth also alluded to the difficulty of this work, attributing it to the institutional barriers and the challenge of finding ways to work from within. I asked her about the focus of the EECS and SCT groups and she shared the following (1-20-16):

Katie: What is the focus of the work in these groups? What is the group's mission?

Beth: The idealistic mission is to move toward equity in schools. And that what turns out- what the actual work is- it does follow the overall mission, but it's about moving incrementally towards change, and trying to find ways to push the agenda that are subtle, palatable enough to move things forwards.

Katie: What do you mean by palatable enough?

Beth: I think there are so many institutional barriers, there are bumping up against any of the isms, disbelief, practical considerations, it's not an overhaul and a revolution, not an overhaul of the current system, but the revolution is trying to find a way to work from within, I think. That sounds so horrible.

Katie: Why's that [sound so horrible]? So are you saying we have to be slick, or maneuver?

Beth: Strategic.

Katie: Strategic, yeah.

In the end, the *school climate data collection and analysis policy* passed as a result of the continuous pressure the School Committee felt from the SCT members. It was not a result of the school committee's desire to pass a policy that attempted to uncover and work to address racial climate issues. At each stage in its development, even

in its final minutes before it was passed, the policy created spaces in which community members and school committee members exhibited their racial literacy. Dan's desire to address additional oppressed populations was supported by Jane's comment to also add in gender identity. Katie, Mae, and later Genevieve use this as an opportunity to educate Dan and Jane, and perhaps others on the school committee and in the audience, on the criticality that the policy focus only on race. They advocated against adding in additional language that might distract from the policy's intent, arguing that the current climate necessitates that issues around race and racism be the focus.

### **Disguised Factors That Sustain Racial Inequity**

In thinking about racism's multilayers (Figure 1), thus far this chapter has exposed how individuals' discourse and actions impact individual and group level racism. Cartfield community members perform racial literacy through their discourse and actions; practices that can serve to sustain or resist racial inequities. As the data reveal, certain Cartfield community members' discourse and actions exhibit a level of racial literacy, whereas for others this is not the case. Whether it is the town leaders who don't participate in a community forum about race; the white parent who asserts that the schools well serve her white children; or the school committee member who understands the need and value of discussing race, these examples demonstrate the relationship between one's racial literacy and how one perpetuates or resists racial inequity.

Relatedly, the data also display the challenges that result from Cartfield community members' variance in racial literacy development. At the group (meso) level this was revealed at a school committee meeting where community members debated the contents of the *School Climate Data Collection and Analysis Policy*. And while differing

degrees of racial literacy is to be expected given racial literacy development is a process, (e.g. Bolgatz, 2005; Guinier, 2004) data show that the variance in community members' racial literacy has town-wide (macro) level implications. This section discusses what I describe as *disguised* factors that serve to sustain the in-school racial inequities. Such factors are hidden because they are not performed by way of community members' discourse or actions, they result from them.

### **Factor #1: A Town Divided**

The variance in community members' racial literacy creates a "town divided" (Duggan, 2010) and not only makes addressing racial inequities challenging, this divide is a disguised condition that works to sustain racial inequities. In my interview with Dan he described the lack of alignment between what he calls equity-oriented people and excellence-oriented people:

There always seemed to have been what I call the excellence people and the equity people, and there has always seem to have been- I don't know if there's been a battle between them- but the excellence people kind of don't care that much about equity and the equity people kind of don't care about excellence. And I have always kind of not understood why they can't co-exist (Dan, Interview 4-1-16)

What might present as a "battle" may be the result of people with varying perspectives competing to present their narrative in implementational spaces. And while participants' varying degrees of racial literacy impact the in-school experiences of students of color, the effects also impact the town climate, creating a divide among those who "get it" (to draw on Robert's words) and those who don't; a divide that prevents progress. Whereas community members' collective lack of racial literacy serves to maintain the status quo and the racial inequities that exist in the Cartfield schools, those who insert their racially literate agendas are often seen as troublesome, as many illustrated.

During my interviews I asked participants to describe a particular event that helped or hindered Cartfield residents' awareness around issues of racial inequity. A number of participants responded that Diane Sherry's coming forth with her story helped (re)start conversations about the experiences of people of color in the school district. Beth, a white parent with elementary school-aged children, was one of them. In an interview she noted,

[Diane Sherry is] a teacher who received racist messages at the school, and I think that helped expose a lot of what goes on, and takes place, and may have helped some people-thinking again about mostly white people or people with privilege- develop more awareness about the day-to-day experience of teachers, administrators, students of color (Beth, Interview 1-20-16).

And while Ms. Sherry's story provoked awareness, it may have, as Beth points out, created a stronger divide between those who acknowledge and those who resist racism's existence in the Cartfield schools. She noted,

at the same time I think it may have- you know there's a backlash, there's a digging in, there's a resistance and a reluctance to truly see and allow oneself to be aware of inequity. There's a search for something wrong with the individual that somehow brought on the series of events. There is a look at the individual teacher's competence and almost as if that justifies what happens in some way. I think that for, I mean unfortunately I think that incidents like that almost reinforce what people think. (Beth, Interview 1-20-16)

Beth alludes to how an individual's racial literacy practices influence how they see and interpret a particular event. She acknowledges that some people viewed Ms. Sherry's incident as a result of who she is as a teacher, ultimately blaming Diane Sherry. They make it an *individual* issue, perhaps unaware of the systemic forces behind the racist attacks.

Additional people felt similarly. In the focus group, Sarah also mentioned this, noting "the Diane Sherry situation went both ways. I think for some people it was

illuminating, but for others it reinforced their stereotypes, so it went both ways” (2-2-16).

In her interview Bridget evidenced noticing this as well stating,

there are the parents in the Diane Sherry situation that in my opinion took it as an opportunity to defend the faculty and administration and defend them with this lens that my experience, and my experience being so great, and how could you think anything horrible is happening here? (Bridget, interview, 1-28-16)

Likewise, Dan’s response was similar:

It brings the topic to the surface because it gets in the paper and all that jazz. Unfortunately with this stuff it splits the people in two. It makes people who are inclined to think ‘oh this is a problem, oh you gotta do something about it’, and it makes other people think it’s blown way out of proportion- people are just making a big deal out of nothing. And so I am afraid it divides people, though I am not sure how much of a problem that is. In general I would say it’s good because it raises awareness- like all this Black Lives Matter stuff- the incidents that have happened are horrible, but they’re good in a way because they bring an awareness that all this stuff is going on that otherwise would not get attention (Dan, interview, 4-1-16).

Peoples’ varying degrees of racial literacy impact how they receive, interpret and react to information about existing racism. As Dan noted, such incidents can cause a further divide between the two groups, making the already-targeted person (e.g. Diane Sherry) further targeted, or, as Bridget pointed out, serving as a catalyst for other people to further their “I don’t see what the problem is” agenda. An “agenda” that is perhaps a result of a lack of racial literacy, yet in sharing it, furthers the divide between the racially literate and illiterate.

## **Factor #2: Racial Literacy Concealment**

While many community members sustain racial inequities by way of underdeveloped racial literacy practices, some actors who display well-developed racial literacy practices do not always capitalize on this knowledge. In fact, such people show

evidence of working to conceal their racial literacy, rather than using these practices to educate and address the racial inequity. Beth alluded to this aspect when she spoke about having to work from “within”, and having to “find ways to push the agenda that are subtle, palatable enough to move things forward”. Beth discloses the need to be sly and tactful in working towards racial equity in the district.

The work of SCT members is evident of this approach. The SCT members (e.g. Marie, Mae, Julia, Beth, Katie) created the *School Climate Data Collection and Analysis Policy* in effort to explore the racial climate in the district. Prompted by the district’s weak response to Diane Sherry’s situation, members felt the need to explore the experiences of students of color, and in particular, the racial climate in the schools. While this was the SCT members’ intent behind the particular policy, it was packaged much differently. School Climate Taskforce members’ approach was not to “rock the boat” and draw light to the fact that the district leaders had done a disservice to Diane Sherry and the Cartfield High School community when they couldn’t maintain her safety. Instead, members displayed a “what sells” approach with the district and bought into the district’s discourse, rather than outwardly stating their own, anti-racist agendas. The slide previously featured in chapter V outlines the benefits of the proposed policy included aspects like *sustainable, trend setting, informative, replicable*. In their presentation SCT members did not focus on building a more racially equitable climate, despite that being the underlying drive in creating the policy. The policy was not packaged as a means to explore racial inequities, but rather *school culture*. Only when the actual language of the policy was revealed did SCT members focus on race.

Racial literacy concealment is problematic for a number of reasons. SCT members gave into the hierarchical structures, playing towards the people in power (in this case, the policy-making school committee members), rather than using this implementational space to educate. They missed the opportunity to raise awareness, draw attention to the issues at hand, and further develop others' racial literacy practices. Concealing one's racial literacy by avoiding issues of race and racism rather than educating around these issues is not only evident of racism's power, this silence further fosters systemic racism. This further supports the claim that if you're not actively working against racism, you're upholding its power. Noteworthy, and a consideration about racial literacy that constitutes further research is that one might alter his/her racial literacy practices depending on the setting and actors. Examining the contexts or conditions that foster or stifle one's display of racial literacy constitutes further research. Such research might also help uncover any connection between the Cartfield's racial climate- the "battle" between those "who get it" and those who don't, and peoples overt performance of racial literacy. In the meantime, the concealment of racial literacy is a disguised factor that works to sustain the in-school racial inequities.

### **Factor #3: Concealment of Student of Color Experiences**

Concealing the experiences of students of color is another disguised fashion in which community members work to sustain in-school racial inequities. Both community members of color and white community members who fell into this category exhibited colorblind discourses, displayed avoidance, practiced colormuteness, or performed whiteness in other ways. Janet Miller's public acknowledgement that the schools well serve her (white) students exemplifies a diversion tactic. She pulled the attention away



from the experience of students of color by inserting her white children's experiences. Similarly, both Beth and Robert brought up the role that white, middle-class parents play in the schools. These parents, according to Beth and Robert, are often unaware of the impact that their comments have on students of color. In this way, they conceal the experience of students of color by drawing attention to what works for white children.

The data reveal multiple instances where colorblindness and colormuteness hide the experience of students of color. One example was during the school committee meeting when Dan and Jane suggested that the policy under discussion include additional foci beyond the district's racial climate. By suggesting the policy include issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. they shift the attention away from students' of color experiences.

### **Disguised Whiteness**

Interesting is the role Lesley Martin plays in concealing the experiences of students/people of color in her role as Cartfield's media and climate specialist. Whether it is her colorblind discourse in her public comments, her colormute performance via the town-wide survey, or her avoidance of the racism-focused radio forum, Martin performs whiteness on multiple occasions. These elements of whiteness are all the more disguised because they are performed by a person of color. In the case of Lesley Martin, whiteness is disguised by the black body. As I myself questioned, for example, how can the discourse of a person of color reflect a colorblind stance? This idea of "disguised whiteness" constitutes further research, though based on the findings from this dissertation I would argue that the enactment of whiteness by people of color further conceals the experiences of people of color. For example, Martin's act of not including

race-related questions on the survey that sought to examine “public perceptions”, suggests she does not acknowledge the fact that people have different experiences based on their race. In this way, she not only conceals, but ignores the experiences of people of color.

Actors’ diverting attention away from people of color by way of their own discourse and actions suggests they are not reflecting on how such actions might affect other people. They do not display a level of racial literacy that allows for critical examination and ongoing questioning of how race and racism impact their actions, and how their actions impact race and racism. Instead, their performance of whiteness by way of colorblindness, colormuteness and other avoidance tactics works towards maintaining racism by not hearing, seeing, or accepting, the experiences of people of color.

### **Chapter Summary & Discussion**

This chapter presents how Cartfield’s administrators, parents, school committee members and community members take up issues of race and racism in out-of-school spaces. Whether it is town leaders and school administrators that practice avoidance; a white mother who by asserting her children are well served by the schools ignores the experiences of people of color; the impact school committee members’ varying degrees of racial literacy has on policy creation; or the persistence required of equity-related group members, the data presented herein illustrate how the out-of-school actors serve to sustain/resist the in-school racial inequities described in chapter IV. Racism impacts how community actors, even from outside classroom walls, compromise the district’s quest to ensure the *academic achievement of every student*.

Yet as the use of an implementational spaces framework uncovers, the effects of these individual, often micro level actions ripple to the group and systemic levels. The ripple effect from community members' varying displays of racial literacy creates a "battle" between those "who get it" and those who don't; a factor that makes dismantling racial inequity all the more challenging. Additionally, community members' concealment of their racial literacy not only results in missed opportunities to build on others' racial literacy practices, such silence perpetuates systemic racism that upholds the existing racial inequities. Equally detrimental is community members' concealment of the experiences of students of color. The silencing effects of colorblindness, colormuteness and avoidance do not allow people to observe the experiences of students of color.

## **CHAPTER VI:**

### **DINNER, DATA, AND DISCUSSIONS**

Many have written about the potentially imperialist nature of qualitative research in which “outsiders” study “others” and represent their voices in a variety of forms (e.g., Fine, 1994; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Tuhiwai Smith (2012), for example, describes “methodological debates”- the broader politics, and the intentional goals of the research, and their impact on oppressed populations. This chapter focuses on the data analysis methods I implemented to explore issues of representation as a white researcher examining issues of race and racism. In my context, privileging “insider” voices and knowledge necessitates drawing in- beyond the data collection phase- the people of color who are subjected daily to the institutional racism and micro-aggressions I examine. Specifically, this chapter examines my second research question: what are the affordances and constraints of research participant collaborative practices of analysis for the roles and voice of the researcher and participants in qualitative research?

The organization of this chapter reflects the typical genre of study- literature review, explanation of methods and analysis, followed by the findings. Keeping with this genre serves to demonstrate the fact that this was a separate study within the larger study, though as will be demonstrated, it was the process described herein that informed the findings of the broader research topic. After briefly reminding readers of the theoretical framework, this chapter discusses a common debate in the field- the role of a white person researching issues of racism. It follows with an examination of the implementation of a data analysis method to address some of the ethical considerations

that confront white researchers conducting race-related research, before presenting the data and then discussing the findings.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Both the larger study and the research described in this chapter are informed by critical race theory (CRT). The use of CRT is not only a lens to identify, but to *transform* the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). As chapter II described, CRT subscribes to numerous tenets. The tenet which is the focus of this chapter is that of *counterstorytelling*. Because of their unique histories and experiences with oppression that typically differ from the grand narrative, CRT emphasizes and prioritizes the voices of people of color through *counterstorytelling*. Providing participants of color with a platform to share their stories captures their perspectives and assessments of the grand narratives; a process that often problematizes or falsifies the status quo.

#### **Striving Towards Praxis: Extending the Use of Counterstorytelling**

Chapter II described the ethical debates surrounding the issues of whites examining racism, urging white researchers to go beyond reflecting about whiteness in the research process. Informed by these ideas, and in effort to apply a level of critical race *praxis* in my own research, I examine the process of extending the constructs of counterstorytelling into the data analysis phase of the research. The following paragraphs illustrate the need to do so.

Delgado (2012) captures the connection between stories and the construction of reality: “we participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it” (p. 72).

Because the “dominant” group possesses more power, their stories are legitimized, and maintain a prominent role in constructing reality. Counterstorytelling showcases the experiences of under-represented participants. Their reports differ so much from society’s grand narrative that they serve to invalidate it. In this sense, counterstorytelling has emancipatory potential for oppressed communities/participants because it positions them as possessing valid knowledge (Freire, 1970; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2014a).

However, things become murky when we unpack this further and look at the actual use of counterstorytelling in research. Education research that applies this construct (see Stovall, 2013; Chapman, 2013; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Howard, 2008; Howard and Reynolds, 2008; Dyrness, 2007) reflects a trend in the field: counterstorytelling is typically used as a data *collection* tool. A participant shares his/her experience with the researcher, and from there the researcher is left to interpret and analyze the story. In conducting the analysis, the researcher brings her (perhaps white) perspective to that process. The (white) researcher is responsible for examining the participant’s story for evidence of resisting a “universal truth” (Souto-Manning, 2014a, p 219). Problematic is the fact that the researcher’s lenses are blurred because she has lived, perhaps even perpetuated, the same universal truths that she attempts to uncover through the analysis process. She runs the risk of misinterpreting her participants’ words, or even manipulating them—like a penny that you put in a machine and crank, twist and turn, until it comes out flat. So much can be lost- or even created- in the analysis process. In discussing Latinx critical race theory’s use of *testimonio*, Gutiérrez (2008) stresses the tension that emerges between a participant sharing one’s story and the researcher using it

as data. Given the historical function of research as a colonial project, the act of using a participants' words to extract theory and build knowledge has exploitative undertones. Similarly, it is troublesome for (white) researchers to put their feelings or interpretations onto their participants' words during the analysis process, as they run a greater risk of "colonizing" participants who are less commonly represented in research (Souto-Manning, 2014a& b). To address this, Souto-Manning (2014a) applies a critical narrative analysis (CNA) approach in her work. This methodology of language research weaves together critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis, allowing a fuller examination of how discourse is representative of an individual's concerns, *and* recycled institutional discourses. She argues that stories have liberating potential- they allow the individual to make sense of their realities, question the issues that affect their lives, and start to address them (Souto-Manning, 2014a, p 205). However, the liberating potential that Souto-Manning (2014a) describes is limited to the participants' *act* of sharing their narratives. In drawing on Bakhtin's (1986) words, Souto-Manning insinuates that the *listener*- the researcher- reaps the most benefits. "When the listener perceived and understand the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active responsive attitude towards it" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68). If the "listener" or researcher, conducts the majority of the analysis, this limits emancipatory potential of this method for the storyteller. Outside of the storyteller's internal process, there is limited opportunity to process the meaning behind the story's content. The storytellers are left to individually explore what the story brings up for them. A more collaborative analysis process might foster the necessary dialog that would lead the researcher *and* participants to additional discoveries.

Taking the above arguments into consideration, I repurpose counterstorytelling and extend its use to the data *analysis* process. By inviting those participants who directly experience the racial inequity into the analysis process, I examined a direct attempt to avoid “colonizing” by means of reproducing the status quo. Just as we invite our under-represented participants to tell their (counter)story in the data collection process, I advocate that we invite our participants to (counter) analyze the collected data. My response takes into account what scholars like Marker (2003), Akom (2011), and Anderson (1989) emphasize- the importance of participant inclusion in the data analysis process. Marker (2003) suggests that the focus should not be *who* conducts the research, but to ensure that the analysis includes the perspectives of both insiders and outsiders (Marker, 2003, p. 31). Akom (2011) echoes this sentiment in his critique of critical ethnography, noting that this methodology should reflect a more collaborative component between researcher and the subjects. Drawing on Anderson (1989), Akom posits greater collaboration would allow “a more ground analysis in the ‘trenches’ of educational practice” (1989, 262). The next section describes in greater detail how I collaborated with my participants during the analysis process.

### **Collaborative Data Analysis**

I applied counterstorytelling differently than what is typically seen in education research, and used it in my data *analysis* process. To examine my data sets I collaborated with people of color who have been active participants alongside me in Cartfield’s community organizing groups. I presented this opportunity to people of color who were involved in the school climate taskforce (SCT), and one person (Marie) chose to participate. Though not part of the SCT, Diane Sherry also accepted my invitation. Her



narrative was the impetus for my dissertation, and I believed her insight would be critical in analyzing the data. Marie was very active in speaking out on behalf of Diane's situation. The two worked in tandem to draw attention to Diane's struggle, and in doing so, allowed others to speak to the institutional racism they'd experienced. Both Diane and Marie are black women.

On three separate occasions Marie, Diane and I met for 2-3 hours for collaborative data analysis sessions. For each of these sessions I chose a piece of data that we analyzed together, be it a portion of a school committee transcription, a newspaper article, etc. The goal was not to get through a lot of data, but to deeply analyze a small chunk of it. In one of our sessions, for example, we analyzed 2 pages of a school committee transcription for 3 hours. Our sessions generally followed a loose agenda: check in, my presentation/explanation of the data set, individual review of the data set, and response to the pre-session journal prompt (Appendix D). From there, we took turns discussing our thoughts and interpretation of the data set. Afterwards we individually responded to the post-session journal prompt (Appendix E). We closed by debriefing about the process and our feelings. Aware that reviewing the data could trigger various emotions, I made it a point to check in with the participants on multiple occasions throughout the sessions, in effort to gauge their emotional temperature.

Thus, the data sources from the collaborative data analysis sessions include audio recordings of the sessions (later transcribed), the fieldnotes I took during the sessions, and the pre- and post- reflective journals from participants (myself included). The audio recordings captured our real-time interpretations of a particular data set, whereas the journals allow us to reflect on if, and how, our analysis was influenced by the other

participants' interpretations. Taken together, these sources allow me to examine the role of *counterstorytelling* in the data analysis process and its impact on researcher/participant roles.

### **Data Analysis**

Simultaneous to the coding process of the data from the larger study, I was also engaging with my participants in collaborative data analysis sessions. Thus, I re-analyzed various texts in partnership with Marie and Diane. The examples included in this chapter display portions of our critical discourse analysis of two school committee meeting public comments. Conducting discourse analysis allows me to see the broader social context. Van Dijk (2001) explains some of the benefits of discourse analysis which include uncovering how discourse controls less powerful groups, as well as the consequences that result, including social inequality, or racial inequity. Souto-Manning (2014a) notes that “discourse analysis is increasingly considered and applied as a tool in the social sciences as it attempts to explore the construction of socially created ideas and things in the world as well as their maintenance over time” (p. 203).

The structure of our analysis was intentionally non-structured. While I contemplated asking my participants to use Mica Pollock's (2004) concept of *colormuteness*—the silence around issues of race—as a lens to inform our critical discourse analysis, after some reflection and informal consultation with other scholars, I decided against providing a framework and left it up to my participants to identify what spoke to them. That being said, my own interpretation of the data was informed by Pollock's construct, and I looked closely at how school committee members and school administrators embraced or resisted discussing race-related issues that the community

groups broached (e.g. discipline disparities, class tracking systems which resulted in segregated classes, issues of school climate). I also examined newspaper sources for similar trends, and identified similarities and differences in how race was presented in each of these contexts.

To explore the impact of the collaborative data analysis sessions I utilized the recorded conversations of the sessions and reflective journals. In listening to our recorded data analysis sessions I looked for discursive acts that show evidence of counterstorytelling- examples of negotiation, disagreement, or moments of understanding. What causes each of us to interpret the data as we do (what lived experience, theoretical grounding?) and how do we challenge each other's perspectives by sharing these experiences? The reflective journals that each group member wrote at the beginning and end of our sessions were intended to capture if, and to what extent each of our interpretations of the data sets changed as a result of our collaboration. How do our colleague's interpretations influence our own? What are the *counterstories* that provoked these changes? I conducted ethnographic coding and discourse analysis to address these questions. I then reviewed my findings with my collaborative data analysis participants.

In the following sections I describe two separate data analysis sessions (November 30, 2015 and February 3, 2016) which feature our collaborative analysis of public comments made by Lesley Martin and Steve Wilson, respectively. Both public comments were spoken at the March 25, 2014 school committee meeting. I chose to analyze these comments in our collaborative data analysis sessions as I had interpreted Martin and Wilson's (both people of color) discourse as having colorblind undertones. As

a white researcher this confused me, and I was curious to explore this more fully with Marie and Diane.

### **Collaborative Data Analysis Session #1 (November 30, 2015)**

On November 30, 2015, Diane Sherry, Marie Abekam and I gathered in the lower level of my home. Sitting on the couch we drank hot tea and ate quiche, popcorn, and brownies by the coziness of the stove. This was the first of what would end up being a total of three collaborative data analysis sessions (fieldnotes, 12-4-15).

As noted, data analysis sessions followed the same format reflected by the agenda in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Collaborative Data Analysis Group #1 Agenda (11-30-15)

1. IRB explanation, & choose pseudonym, if desired
2. Presentation/explanation of the data set (Katie)
3. Review the data set (individually)
4. Completion of pre-session journal prompt (individually)
5. Discussion/sharing of thoughts, interpretations (collectively)
6. Completion of post-session journal prompt (individually)
7. Recap: reflection question

What intended to be a two hour conversation on November 30 ended up to be three and a half; Diane and Marie left my home that evening at 10:30.

### **Data Set**

Our goal that evening was to discuss a small portion of transcribed data from the school committee on March 25, 2014. I chose this particular data set as it was at this meeting that Diane made her public statement about the racist attacks she had been

subjected to, and the lack of response she felt from the district. Essential to note is the atmosphere at the School Committee meeting that evening. The March 25, 2014 school committee meeting was a critical moment; an *implementational space* that actors took up in various ways. There was high emotion in the room from those who intended to use this space to draw attention to the latest episode in a long line of historical injustices in Cartfield's schools. Diane and Marie's goal that evening was to hold the administrators accountable to enact real change (fieldnotes, 12-4-15). Diane's statement had set the stage, calling attention to the injustices she had experienced, but more importantly, the lack of response from the district; an "anemic" response as Diane had described it. Thus, Diane and Marie's comments during our collaborative data analysis session capture their sentiments 20 months later; a point by which they had repeatedly witnessed apathetic responses from the district leaders.

My fieldnotes from our collaborative analysis session on December 4, 2015 briefly describe our focus:

We looked at March 25, 2014 school committee transcripts. I had printed off 10 pages, not knowing how much we'd get through. Over the course of 2+ hours we worked through Dave's words [a white man who at the time served as the chair of the school committee] and Lesley Martin's words [a community member of color who in August of 2014 was hired by the town and the school district in her role as Cartfield's climate and media specialist (a new position)]. I had mentioned that it was quality/depth that is more important than getting through a lot of data... I dictated the decision to start with Dave's words, because I wanted to look at how Diane was introduced. While Diane had disclosed in another setting (before the high school students and staff) via video what had happened to her, I viewed this [school committee meeting] as the first time she makes her thoughts known about the administration's reaction (fieldnotes 12-4-15).

Thus, during our first three-hour collaborative session our focal point was an analysis of the school committee chair's direct response to Diane Sherry's statement as well as Lesley Martin's response. To illustrate how our collaboration responds to my inquiry regarding *how this method includes different viewpoints and impacts dominant researcher/participant roles in educational ethnographic research?* I focus on our analysis of Lesley Martin's words (lines 43-56) featured in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Analyzed Excerpt #1: School Climate Specialist's Public Comment

43. My name is Lesley Martin. I'm a member of the community- a parent. After  
44. listening to this beautiful speech I think we have an opportunity before us. And I'm not  
45. just speaking before you. To all of us, as I look around there's diversity here. And we've  
46. all come to support from many social [sic] backgrounds and colors. This is an  
47. opportunity; we have to take advantage of it now or never. No more lip service, no more  
48. ideas and just talking about what we can do down the road. It has to happen now. I'd like  
49. to ask all of us to consider what color we would be if we had no melanin or no skin.  
50. What's underneath- how we treat her is how we treat our sister, our mother, our broth-w  
51. We have to look at it that way. It can't be this African American woman over here and  
52. what do we do with her, and deal with racism. What do we do with one another? It  
53. diminishes all of us. She's absolutely correct. And more so to the people who do nothing  
54. if we could remember that message, and live by that, and work by that, and every move  
55. we make from here on out it's an opportunity. We have to see it as an opportunity this is  
56. a blessing. Ok? Thank you. (Lesley Martin, school committee meeting, 3-25-14)

### **Discussion about School Climate Specialist's Discourse**

I had originally intended to include portions of the conversation Diane, Marie and I had about the excerpt featured in Figure 5 in order to represent our thinking process together. Yet including the excerpt in its entirety draws attention away from collaborators' contributions. When Diane, Marie and I met to analyze data transcriptions, our process was layered with our personal connections to people, their words and our emotions and values/social justice commitments as educators. We tried to make sense of

people's words vis-à-vis antiracist values and how their interventions impacted potential agendas as well as opportunities to challenge what we identified as racist. Diane, Marie and I learned from each other and impacted each other's thinking. When representing these sessions and writing about them as an ethnographer, I dealt with tensions concerning voice and just representation of my collaborators' contributions. What I am presenting here, are part of those sentiments and our team's intellectual contributions.

Before moving into to a discussion about the findings from this collaborative data analysis session, I include additional data from February 3, 2016. From there I will discuss the insights gleaned from our conversations, like the one previously featured.

### **Collaborative Data Analysis Session #2 (February 3, 2016)**

On a separate occasion, February 3, 2016, Diane, Marie and I met for our second of three data analysis session. During this session we focused on the Steve Wilson's public comment, as with the School Climate Specialist's words, I had interpreted Steve's words as having colorblind undertones and wanted to hear Marie and Diane's analysis.

### **Data Set**

At the March 25, 2014 school committee meeting Steve Wilson, an elderly man of color, made a public comment (Figure 6) that left me wondering. As reflected in my fieldnotes, when I first heard Steve's discourse about the "oneness of the human family" and the advocacy for "one race" and "one human family", what I interpreted was a man of color aligning himself with a colorblind approach. In the collaborative data analysis session on February 3, 2016 I sought clarification from Marie and Diane, knowing they knew Steve better than I did.

Figure 6. Analyzed Excerpt #2: Steve Wilson's Public Comment

99. You know I moved here in 1987, and when I moved here, I thought I was moving  
100. into Mister Rogers' neighborhood (laughter from the audience). Soon I realized I  
101. was in so much denial. But I saw there was a lot of work to do and I sort of tried to  
102. get involved. But the words that I said then, I'm gonna say again tonight. We  
103. suggested back then that there are in every school- k-12- there should be taught the  
104. oneness of the human family. The two reasons why: 1) because the oneness of the  
105. human family can act as a vaccine against racism for the young people that are  
106. growing up. They won't just necessarily feel that they can tolerate each other, but  
107. they'll learn how to love one another as they grow. And 2) the oneness of the human  
108. family- there's only one race and only one human family- has been told by the  
109. scientists, has been a reality. It's a truth. And isn't that what our schools are  
110. supposed to be teaching our children? the truth? Isn't that true?  
(Steve Wilson, school committee meeting, 3-25-14)

### **Transcribed Conversation about Community Member's Discourse**

The conversation below between Marie, Diane and me pertains to Steve Wilson's public comment at the March 25, 2014 school committee meeting (featured in Figure 6).

Katie: Can I ask you about his words?

Marie: About Steve's words?

Katie: Yeah. So I am trying to wrap my head around the whole...

Marie: race amity thing?

Katie: Yeah, the "oneness of the human family" and talk about "all things that divide us not just race" So I read those and I interpret those as almost colorblind

Diane: Avoidance

Katie: Yeah avoidance. So I don't know him, and I don't know if you all know him but

Marie: we do

Katie: What's the deal?

Diane: Yeah, ok. Ok.

Marie: Steve is Bahá'í. So we also think that his whole view of life is informed by his religious outlook. Ok. As well as his commitment to racial amity is part of that. They are not given to confrontation in the way that we would want...He's very forceful about pushing forth in this town, and also using it as a means of fostering conversations around



race. So it might be a different approach. It might be a calmer, less confrontational, hard-edged approach. But it's an approach still for those people out there who feel a little bit more comfortable fighting racism in that way, and I think it is more... it is useful. You understand? Because not everyone is gonna see it and be all riled up. So, his idea about, and I think he really does believe that- that there's one race and it's the human race. And also recognizing that yes there is race, and other things as well, and I think he really does believe that too. So I think that's where he is coming from though it can be seen as colorblind, but I don't think that it was necessarily his intention to obfuscate the issue at hand, but to say well this is his contribution to the conversation because what I know of Steve and his work is that Steve is very focused on racism and tries to foster community engagement and actual sessions and trainings and that kind of thing.

Diane: I have a bit of a different take. I think it's effective only on the surface. I feel like it's a safe way for a lot of people of color to fight racism, is to somehow mix it in with other stuff so that the ugliness of it doesn't really... you don't really have to talk about it in that way. I know some people feel that that's the best way to get the message across 'cause then people will hear them because it's not war and it's not forceful... well maybe not forceful because I think Steve is a forceful person. I feel like it's just a safe way. And for me it's a subconscious cop out in fighting racism. And I personally don't feel it's that effective. I don't see and again maybe it's my own limitation, I'm just not seeing where it's going. I feel like racism is one of them beasts that really needs to be addressed.  
(Katie, Marie & Diane, collaborative data analysis session, 2-3-16)

### **Findings: Research Product and Process**

The themes generated from coding collaborative data analysis session fieldnotes, pre- and post- journals, and the transcriptions of our conversations revealed that these sessions impacted both the research product, as well as the research process. In this section I first illustrate how the sessions influenced the product of this dissertation- the contents herein-, before describing how the collaborative aspect impacted the process.

#### **Research Product**

Our discussion of both Lesley Martin (lines 43-56) and Steve Wilson's (lines 99-110) discourse is one example that demonstrates how the process of conducting collaborative data analysis sessions with Diane and Marie allowed for a fuller

representation of the data than my sole analysis. In essence, their *analyses counter* my limited perspective; a perspective that without Diane and Marie's input would have remained uncontested. In the following examples, Diane and Marie's analyses offer supporting evidence that helps explain Lesley Martin and Steve Wilson's seemingly colorblind discourse; information I would not have been privy to without their insight. Diane and Marie are able to speak to Martin and Wilson's words from their perspective as women of color; their explanations "add necessary contextual contours" (Ladson-Billings, 2016, p. 19) about people of color, by women of color.

### **Understanding Lesley Martin**

I begin by describing the various perspectives Diane and Marie offered as I worked to understand Lesley Martin's discourse featured in lines 43-56. Our conversation enabled me to discover the information featured in the following subsections, which informed the explanation I then present to readers. As I argue, the insight Diane and Marie provided offered a fuller representation of Martin's discourse, discourse that without their perspectives I would have described as colorblind, but without offering potential explanation as to why.

### **Martin's Disconnection to her Black Body**

I learn from Marie that Lesley Martin's discourse, or "babble" as Marie described it, could be a result of the disconnection she feels as a black woman in a white space. Lesley's points are disconnected- as Marie described, "faltering, hesitant and timid". Lesley Martin doesn't conclude a thought before beginning a new one. According to Marie, if she were to conclude a thought, she might be led to acknowledge the same racism to which she is "so averse". Thus, she shifts away from that particular idea before

completely articulating it. According to Marie, this disconnection of thoughts is a “further indication of her own disconnection from owning her black body and what that black body represents in this white space.”

Marie and Diane also shed light on how Lesley Martin separates herself from people of color through her speech; something I had not noticed as a white woman. Diane points out that Lesley does not call her by name, but rather references her “in the third person as if I wasn’t even there. The “her”, the “she”, this disconnection. And even her refusing to call me by name”. (Diane). Diane also noted that Lesley not only separated herself from Diane, but with the rest of the people of color in the room. Diane references how Lesley alludes to this idea of separating from her own skin, noting Lesley’s words, “‘if we take off the skin then we’re all the same’ ”. Marie also noticed this, stating,

Then tries to deflect her own black body to the other black bodies that are there, ‘no don’t look at me, look at them’. So she was saying “I’m not just speaking before you- to all of us” and then she goes on, “as I look around there’s diversity here”. She’s saying ‘don’t look at me because I am speaking now and I am black, oh, there’s more black people’ (Marie).

According to Marie, Lesley separates herself from the other people of color in the room.

In her pre-journal, Marie noted that by Lesley bringing in diversity, she adopts a discourse typically used by white people who don’t feel comfortable talking about racism. Marie also noted that Lesley expands her discussion to class as well.

“[W]e’ve all come from many social (sic) backgrounds and colors” (line 46) seems to suggest this speaker’s desire to diffuse the implication of race in this incident by trying to infuse class. This is a common tactic of whites who are uncomfortable or unwilling to engage with issues on race, so they try to muddy the water by including class or gender issues into the discussion to deflect attention away from the issue at hand: racism! My assessment is supported by the fact that this speaker goes on to say, “what color would we be if we had no melanin or no skin...?”(line 49). (Marie, pre-session journal, 11-30-15)

Most striking and informative to me is Marie's explanation behind Lesley's desire to 'take off her skin'. Marie draws on her home culture to explain the severity of struggle Lesley demonstrates. By doing so Marie offered me a clearer understanding a psychological impact I had not considered prior to the collective data analysis session, nor had even been aware. Marie stated,

I always think of Lesley as a [says something in a language that of us three, only she and Diane understand]- I do believe she would be one of the- you know in [my home country] there's a phenomenon about people who go away to England and come back and they're crazy. People say "oh you're so mad," mad meaning crazy" (Marie).

In her explanation Marie drew on literary works to support her analysis- the "psycho break" as she called it, discussed by Caribbean writers, as well as another (unnamed) writer who personifies black skin. Marie noted, "I remember a writer talking about this- this talking to the skin, as a way of personifying the skin, as if to say 'you are the trouble'" (Marie).

### **Lesley Martin: Ceasing an Opportunity**

Diane sees things differently than Marie, agreeing that while there is an underlying level of disconnect to her race, Diane believes Lesley Martin is tactful in her approach and discourse. She noted in our discussion, "this is where me and Marie kind of part ways on Lesley Martin, because I don't see it as being that innocent. I see Lesley Martin and an opportunist, and I think that's what drives Lesley Martin" (Diane).

Important to note is that Lesley Martin's comments in lines 43-56 on March 25, 2014 were from the perspective of a Cartfield resident; at that time, Lesley Martin had not yet been appointed as Climate and Media specialist, a position for which she was hired by the town and school district in August 2014 (*Cartfield Times*, 8-22-14). Diane explained that

she believes Lesley Martin might have already been in conversation with the administration, “I want to believe that there were already conversations happening with Lesley Martin playing some sort of role in the community” (Diane) and that her comments that evening were in direct result of Martin feeling that she *should* speak, almost a means of putting herself on display before the district. As Diane noted,

I feel like every time Lesley Martin gets up, I think that it’s because Lesley Martin feels she is supposed to get up. That is what is expected of her, that is what the administration wants to see, is Lesley Martin to get up and for Lesley Martin to address the community (Diane).

Yet what is difficult for Lesley Martin, Diane explained, is that Lesley Martin has difficulty in crafting a statement because she doesn’t know how to address the topic of racism- an issue that inevitably directly affects her- without owning her black identity. Diane described Lesley Martin’s uncertainty- her identity being caught by her own words:

But she doesn’t quite know how to do it because this woman looks like her. The people you are asking me to address look just like me, and again, because I do believe there is some denial going on within Lesley Martin, it just comes off really, really scattered. (Diane).

Thus, for Diane, Lesley Martin’s words go beyond her psychological disconnection from her black body as Marie posits. Instead, Diane believes Lesley Martin is tactful in her approach, yet presents a convoluted statement because she does not know how to fully disconnect from her blackness while discussing racism- a phenomenon that inevitably affects her, but to which she cannot openly admit in that setting.

### **The Counter-Analysis**

Diane and Marie’s analyses allow for a fuller explanation of Lesley Martin’s colorblind discourse. By drawing on their positionality as women of color, their home

country, and in the case of Marie, the literature she's read, they explained the disconnect Lesley Martin has with her black skin. Further, as a result of Diane's exploration of Lesley Martin's tentative working relationship with district administrators, Marie, Diane and I were prompted to take our analysis to the next level, examining the impact of Lesley Martin's words. We conclude that by later hiring a woman of color who presents as colorblind serves to perpetuate the colorblind narrative the district upholds:

Katie: 'cause she's not being productive in fighting the colorblind narrative.

Diane: No and in fact she's one of the faces that they put up there that says, this is a black woman, we

Katie: She's perpetuating it.

Lesley Martin's level of disconnect in her statement featured in lines 43-56 is not atypical for her; her words featured in other excerpts display a similar lack of substance. By later hiring Lesley Martin, the district and town leaders aligned to the colorblind approach Martin adopted in her comments on March 25, 2014. As many of the leaders were in the room and heard her comments that day, it is assumed they are aware of her stance. Marie assumed the district leadership was willing to let Martin subject herself to the embarrassment her babble creates for her, just as long as it works in the district's favor. As Marie noted, "the district doesn't mind... They are good with that. They don't care how faltering and ineloquent she is" (Marie). In this sense, the district let a woman of color self-destruct by way of her discourse, in order to showcase a woman of color who preaches colorblindness.

Finally, this collaborative data analysis session allowed me to extend my understanding beyond the particular data set we discussed. Because of Diane's comment about how Lesley Martin's job is to make things "look pretty" I expanded my

understanding of the purpose behind the *United Cartfield* initiative. The *United Cartfield* mission statement, which reads: “Infusing fresh perspectives with a wide range of contexts through an expanding circle of voices, United Cartfield is a creativity hub for advancing community, collaboration, equity and inclusion in Cartfield” says very little, just as its website, according to Diane. Yet for the town and school district, less important perhaps is the actual substance of *United Cartfield* than is the appearance that efforts are being made. Thus, for the town and school district who are behind the initiative, what makes the *United Cartfield* even “prettier” is the fact that a woman of color with a colorblind approach directs it.

Showcasing portions of our November 30, 2015 collaborative data analysis session conversations provides evidence as to how Diane and Marie’s *stories* provided me, the white researcher, a fuller explanation of the data set. In this case, Diane and Marie provided insight that helps to explain Lesley Martin’s colorblind discourse; a representation I would not have been privy to, nor able to provide without Diane and Marie’s knowledge. In essence, their stories *counter* my limited perspective by embellishing my understanding of elements I am not privy to as a white woman. My fieldnotes from that evening captured this:

I would not have been able to look at Lesley’s words with this perspective had Marie not shared this information... essentially, the fact that Lesley acts this way for this particular reason. Diane also justified my idea about colorblind perspective she [Lesley] was alluding to. Beyond that, Diane and Marie talked extensively about how Lesley positions herself- which I hadn’t picked up on. It was because of Marie and Diane’s experience of being a person of color among whites that I was able to gain a bit of understanding about this from their perspective- the idea of positioning and playing to which ever audience Lesley is addressing (fieldnotes, 12-4-15).

### **(Mis)Understanding Steve Wilson**

Undoubtedly, as the section about Lesley Martin's discourse demonstrates, Diane and Marie offered me a fuller understanding of the featured data set by way of sharing their experiences and knowledge as women of color. Additionally, they were able to offer an explanation of Steve Wilson's "oneness of the human family" comment; something I did not understand until they informed me of his Bahá'í identity. My understanding that Steve's discourse was not intentionally colorblind was a direct result of my collaboration and discussion with Diane and Marie. As a result of this understanding I was able to more fully analyze the school superintendent's act of citing Steve Wilson's words in her own public comment at that same school committee meeting. As I will explain, in quoting Steve's words, the superintendent altered the original meaning of his message given her identity as a white woman. Furthermore, as this example also demonstrates, my collaboration with Diane and Marie has greater implications for this study. The information gleaned from this session in combination with an *implementational spaces* framework, helps to uncover the relationship between racial literacy and racism.

At the same March 25, 2014 school committee meeting where Steve Wilson spoke, Superintendent Jane Wyndym subscribed to Wilson's discourse during her comments. She stated,

... I'd like to say I love the phrase- I don't know what Steve's last name is [Jane is informed of his name by a colleague] Mr. Wilson's [phrase] 'the oneness of the human family.' It's something that really I can feel deeply, and that we do have to work to love one another. I'm 100% committed to reaching out to our community and having you come in and join with me (Jane Wyndym, school committee meeting, 3-25-16).

We are to assume that Jane Wyndym does not know Steve Wilson well enough to realize he is a practicing Bahá'í, as she admits to not knowing his last name. The



white superintendent adopted one of Steve's phrases to support her push for a collaborative approach to addressing the situation (Diane Sherry's racist attacks)- a situation she did not identify by name. This silence, as with other examples seen throughout this study, served to perpetuate the racial inequities by way of avoidance. Likewise, while she might be well intended, her act as a white woman aligning to a black man's discourse manipulated its original meaning.

Jane Wyndym's act of citing Steve Wilson's words not only allowed the superintendent to avoid addressing the tense situation Diane Sherry clearly articulated in her statement minutes before, but, because she is a white woman, her reappropriation of Wilson's words changed their meaning. Steve spoke about "the oneness of the human family" as an elderly black man- someone who has witnessed racism first hand, and was middle-age during the height of the civil rights era. He does not deny that racism exists, nor does he deny the fact that our experiences vary based on skin color. His advocacy for the oneness of the human family, as Marie and Diane explained to me, resides in his religious beliefs. Wyndym comes from a different background than Wilson, most evident is that she is at least 35 years younger, and white. A white woman in a position of power latching on to, and proclaiming the "oneness of the human family" created a different meaning; one that could be interpreted by some (including myself) as advocating colorblindness. Her act of subscribing to Steve's "oneness of the human family" was a safe move on the surface. She cannot be viewed as overtly racist, for example, if she agrees with, and repeats the words of a black man. However, with further analysis, Jane Wyndym's discourse during this implementational space demonstrated the relationship between one's racial literacy and racism.

## **Racial Literacy and Racism**

In repeating Steve Wilson's words, Jane Wyndym subscribed to a stance that ignores the oppression or privilege that people experience based on their skin color. The use of "the oneness of the human family" phrase, in combination with her lack of acknowledgement and naming of the racist attacks towards Diane Sherry, perpetuated colorblindness. Thus, Jane Wyndym's use of Steve Wilson's words actually supported a false grand narrative that works to sustain racial inequities.

My collaborative analysis session with Diane and Marie allowed me to reflect on my own racial literacy, and the impact it had on my interpretation of the discourse shared during the public comments portion of a school committee meeting. In my case, for example, it was only through my collaboration with Diane and Marie that I came to understand what Steve's words meant; I had previously lacked the full context to understand how Steve's words were *not* intended to be colorblind, despite the resemblance. Only by further questioning the colorblind narrative I had interpreted was I able to understand Steve Wilson's intended message. And, just as my understanding of Steve's words was informed by my racial *ill*iteracy, so too are other individual's interpretations. It is such (mis)understandings, (mis)interpretations that serve to resist or perpetuate false grand narratives that sustain racial inequities and systemic racism. This example uncovers the relationship between an individual's racial literacy, and an individual's role in perpetuating/sustaining/resisting racial inequities, even at the micro (invisible) level of how we interpret and (re)appropriate someone's discourse.

Interesting is that in our collaborative analysis session Diane described Steve Wilson's approach to combatting racism as "effective only on the surface". After Marie

had described Steve as being “very focused on racism” and someone who “tries to foster community engagement and actual sessions and trainings” (Marie, collaborative data analysis session, 2-3-16), Diane noted that such an approach to addressing racism is not powerful enough:

I have a bit of a different take. I think it’s effective only on the surface. I feel like a safe way for a lot of people of color to fight racism is to somehow mix it in with other stuff so that the ugliness of it doesn’t really... you don’t really have to talk about it in that way. I feel like it’s just a safe way. And for me it’s a subconscious cop out in fighting racism. And I personally don’t feel it’s that effective. I don’t see, and again maybe it’s my own limitation, I’m just not seeing where it’s going. I feel like racism is one of them beasts that really needs to be addressed. (Diane, collaborative data analysis session, 2-3-16)

Based on what this portion of the chapter has demonstrated about the relationship between racial literacy and racism, I would echo Diane’s sentiments that Steve’s approach is “effective only on the surface” and that this “safe way” of confronting racism might actually be dangerous. Depending on the racial literacy of those receiving Steve Wilson’s message, his message risks misinterpretation. Worse yet, as witnessed in the above example, the discourse surrounding this anti-racist approach runs the risk of being taken up and re-appropriated in a way that ends up perpetuating racism. Noteworthy, then, is this notion of racial literacy and its role in perpetuating or resisting racism. Stated more pointedly, racial literacy uncovers and demonstrates the role *each individual* plays in the larger system, shedding light on our *individual* role in sustaining/resisting systemic racism in *each* implementational space.

### **Research Process**

As the previous sections demonstrate, analyzing participants’ discourse in collaboration with Marie and Diane deepened my understanding of the particular data

sets, thus affecting the research *product* by impacting the analyses I present to my readers. Marie and Diane's *analyses* helped *counter* my limited, white perspective. As this next section illustrates, findings also reveal that the collaborative data analysis session *process* had varying impacts on the participants. To begin, it provided a space to further interrogate my role as a white researcher, and thus develop my research practices. Additionally, it offered participants the chance to re-view and process what they had witnessed firsthand months earlier.

### **Hyper-reflexivity: Impact on the Researcher**

Through coding pre- and post- session journals, our collaborative data analysis session discussion transcriptions, fieldnotes, and my emails to participants, another theme surfaced: the *process* of how I conducted the collaborative data analysis sessions with participants of color. My fieldnotes, memos, and emails display the reflexivity I exhibited regarding how my actions as a researcher impacted my participants of color *beyond* the data collection phase, both during the intimate collaborative data analysis sessions, and as I composed the findings.

During our collaborative data analysis sessions my attempt was to create an atmosphere where I drew in Marie and Diane to the research process as much as possible. For example, while I set an agenda for each session, I wanted Marie and Diane to know that we could stray from the plan. In my fieldnotes from December 4, 2015 (written 4 days after our November 30, 2015 session) I wrote:

At the beginning of our session I proposed an agenda, but informed Diane and Marie that we would let the conversation take over and stray from the agenda if need be. The goal of the agenda was to give participants a sense of what the evening would entail; I mentioned that I wanted the evening to follow an organic process (fieldnotes, 12-4-15).

The session thus felt more like a casual conversation than a meeting; an ambiance which helped foster our ability to interrupt, ask questions, or offer different opinions, and ultimately work together comfortably to uncover the meaning of the data set in hand.

On occasion, I called Marie and Diane into the research *process* beyond the analyses they offered. For example, I asked them if they had a preference about which data set we analyzed together. “After we looked at the first excerpt, I asked if there was anything in particular Marie and Diane wanted to look at. Diane replied, ‘what would be most useful to you?’” (Fieldnotes, 12-4-15).

My prioritization of the participants’ well-being also took the form of emotional check-ins. In our collaborative analysis sessions we focused on many excerpts from school committee meetings where Marie and Diane had played a pivotal role in unveiling the racial inequities and injustice present in the district. At these meetings they made themselves vulnerable in effort to draw attention to the racial climate in Cartfield’s schools. I surmised that returning to this point in time by reading transcriptions from the meetings was undoubtedly emotionally challenging for them. As a result, at multiple moments during our sessions I stopped our conversation to assess their emotional temperature. “I asked multiple times (at least three over the course of the evening) how the process was, and if it was going ok/if they felt comfortable. I reminded Diane directly, that she could stop at any time” (fieldnotes, 12-4-15).

Inviting in participants who themselves were so close to the data sets- who *are* the data sets, in fact- required that I was astute to the impact the act of re-visiting the events via analysis might have on Marie and Diane. This was very personal work, and very delicate work. It heightened my sensitivity towards Marie and Diane’s emotional well-

being during our collaborative sessions, but also how I represented their words. Given the intimate nature of these sessions and the opportunity they provided to deepen my relationship with Marie and Diane, I felt an even greater sense of responsibility to accurately represent their words. I reflected on this aspect frequently as is evidenced by excerpts from my memos. At the end of my 12-4-15 fieldnotes I jotted a note to myself: “the nature of the fieldnotes (because it is my recount of the evening, and my words) privileges my voice/my perspective of the evening... this is something to consider. . .” I felt a sense of hypocrisy. Here I was attempting to draw in different perspectives, yet the fieldnotes *I* was composing inevitably prioritized *my* perspective. Likewise, in a memo from 12-6-15, I wrote,

since Monday, when we met, I have been thinking a lot about our work together. I want to be sure that I am not exploiting Marie and Diane. This lingers with me. The question is: how will I showcase their thoughts, their views, and do justice for them? (memo, 12-6-15).

I expressed this sentiment in my email to Marie and Diane and asked them to provide feedback about how I captured the data analysis session.

I have attached the fieldnotes I wrote from our session last Monday. I invite you to read them over and let me know any changes/omissions/additions you'd like me to make. This is a first pass at this- it captures the evening based on my jottings. I have yet to transcribe our session, or look at your journal entries. I want to discuss further with you how I will use the information from our conversations- and explicitly hear your thoughts on what to include/what not to include. (e.g. I don't have to include direct quotes you if you'd prefer I don't) (email, 12-9-16).

The email captures another element I had been thinking about: how I use the language from the transcriptions (see Duff & Roberts, 1997; Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997 for more about representation of language). As with any transcription, some of the direct quotes, if decontextualized, could poorly represent the speaker. As such, I wanted to be

sure that Marie and Diane had a final say as to how, and which of their words were presented.

The level of reflexivity I experienced- a hyper-reflexivity of sorts- was a direct result of my collaboration with Marie and Diane in the analysis phase of the research. Because the collaboration provided me a greater understanding of my research participants' perspectives about the data, this provoked an ongoing questioning of my whiteness in the analysis process, as well as in the writing stages of the research. I reflected about the role my whiteness plays in both how I represent people of color in my work, as well as how I speak to issues related to race and racial inequity in educational ethnographic research. By inviting participants of color into the analysis process, and hearing Marie and Diane's stories, I was able to examine how my interpretations of the data are limited to my own lived experience and perspectives as a white female. In this sense, Marie and Diane, served to *counter-by-embellishment* my single interpretation. Additionally, by citing their own culture, experiences, and perspectives I became aware of what I *didn't* bring to my analysis, which in turn heightened my understanding of how my white perspective, without their disrupting it, could easily perpetuate the status quo by way of reproducing white interpretations. In this way, carrying the construct of counterstorytelling and its elements *beyond* the data collection phase and into the analysis process allowed me to build my own racial literacy (Winans, 2010). Not only did our collaboration offer insight into certain cultural and sociocultural contexts that I am not typically exposed to as a white woman, I gained a heightened sense of my whiteness in the analysis and writing stages of the research, and the impact this has on my role in perpetuating and sustaining racism by way of my research. As a researcher, I improved

my ability to “critically examine and continually question how race and racism inform beliefs, interpretive frameworks, practices, cultures, and institutions” (Winans, 2010, p. 477), in my research practices.

### **Beyond Member Checks: Impact on the Participants**

In one of my memos I mentioned that one of my fears was that our collaborative data analysis sessions were exploitative in nature, an element many scholars have considered as is evidenced by the discussion at the beginning of this chapter. While I saw the benefit that this process had on my white researcher identity, as well as the *process* by which I conducted my research, and the *product* that resulted, the findings revealed that Marie and Diane also viewed this work as beneficial for them personally.

The theme that emerged from coding the various sources was that participation in the collaborative data analysis sessions was therapeutic in nature for Diane and Marie. The source that most obviously captures this is my fieldnotes from our first session, where I note:

Perhaps it is the nature of their involvement in the data set we’re looking at, but one thing that they reported was that looking at the discourse was “therapeutic” (Diane) and that it was helpful to see it/review it again. For Marie, she said it was interesting to look back at these words with everything she knows now. She first heard Dave at that meeting, and as she said “I didn’t know then what I know now”... she gave him the “benefit of the doubt”. But since then, she has educated herself and come to know how the school committee “functions,” so her discourse analysis at this point is quite different than what it would have been (fieldnotes, 12-4-15).

The sessions offered all of us the opportunity to revisit and reexamine what we had experienced firsthand; and in Diane and Marie’s case, their involvement in Diane’s struggle created a level of stress they endured for numerous consecutive months. Thus,



for Diane to describe the process of reviewing the discourse as “therapeutic” holds even greater weight.

Apart from Diane’s direct description, Marie’s journal entries also captured the therapeutic nature the sessions offered participants. On multiple accounts Marie alluded to the sense of clarity she gleaned from reviewing the data sets and discussing them. In response to one journal question she noted:

The speaker, whose words I examined was revealed upon close evaluation to be disingenuous, glib and platitudinous. His sentiments hollow and vacuous, promising nothing but more of the same. Upon closer examination, I understand more fully why the school administration did so little during the season of attacks leveled at Ms. Sherry and chose to do nothing after the attacks happened (Marie’s post-session journal, 11-30-15).

Here, Marie alluded to the fact that “closer examination” provided some answers for her- “I understand more fully”- in regards to why the school administration acted like they did. While the information was perhaps difficult to swallow, Marie gained a sense of clarity. Likewise, in response to the question on the post-journal that asked “Did your initial interpretation of this data set’s components change from your initial, independently conducted analysis? If so, how?” Marie replied:

My interpretation changed while I was conducting the examination. It started to make a lot more sense to me why these administrators and public officials, who spoke so seemingly passionately and eloquently at the beginning of this whole affair became so stubbornly inert and closed as the issues unfolded. Their words were empty, their passion a performance, their intent unchanged for they had determined from day one to do NOTHING about changing the culture, the status quo that made Ms. Sherry’s attacks possible (Marie’s post-session journal, 11-30-15)

Here again Marie pointed to this idea of clarity: “it started to make a lot more sense to me”, in describing why the administrators acted the way they did. Revisiting the

discourse months after the school committee meeting had taken place was a therapeutic process in that it offered Marie a sense of clarity.

Noteworthy from these particular journal responses, and showcased in other responses as well, is Marie's use of this space to express her feelings. Her tone, captured by descriptive vocabulary words including "glib", "disingenuous", and "platitudinous" ; her description of the administrators "their words were empty, their passion a performance, their intent unchanged"; and her use of capital letters as she notes their apathy, "they had determined from day one to do NOTHING", all serve to display her sense of frustration and anger. This was evident too as Marie strayed from the journal prompt question in her pre-session journal entry:

The superintendent's words are passionate and filled with urgency and promises that we know by now have not been fulfilled nor show any indication or will on the part of her administration to being fulfilled. She explicitly said, "We failed Diane." Yes they did and as many times as they had opportunities to turn things around for the better, they have failed each time to rise to the challenge" (Marie's pre-session journal, 2-17-16)

While Marie described the superintendent's words in the first sentence, her second sentence, "yes they did and as many times as they had opportunities to turn things around for the better, they have failed each time to rise to the challenge" is a direct commentary about the situation. In this fashion she used the journal as a means to put her sentiments in writing, an act that is therapeutic in itself.

Finally, the collaboration offered Marie and Diane a sense of reassurance. On most accounts, contrary to my experience, Marie and Diane's interpretation of the data set did not drastically change as a result of our discussion. Rather, their responses showed a sense of reassurance about their individual stances. In response to the question, "by the

end of the session, what was your interpretation of the data set?” Diane replied, “Same as above. Just a deeper, richer analysis” (Diane’s post-session journal, 2-3-16). Likewise, on 11-30-15, Marie made a similar comment in response to this question, noting

As I listened to the perspectives of others as they gave feedback, I became more strongly convinced that my misgivings are justified. As I listened to Diane (Data Analyzer # 2 ☺) speak, I was more convinced about the hypocrisy of the words of Speaker #1 [referring to Dave, the chair of the school committee] (Marie, post-session journal 11-30-15).

Hearing Diane’s analysis about Dave’s words reassured Marie about the validity of her own “misgivings”.

Frequently, Diane and Marie reported that their interpretation of the data set went unchanged. Yet on a rare occasion I saw the learning opportunities that resulted for Marie and Diane; learning opportunities that were triggered by our collaboration. For example, in response to the post-session journal questions “Did your initial interpretation of this data set’s components change from your initial, independently conducted analysis? What changed this interpretation? Was it someone else’s perspective? Whose? And what did that person say that made you consider another perspective?” Diane responded with the following:

My initial analysis did not change, however the conversation with peer analyzers expanded my initial analysis. Comments on colorblind comments and analysis of the struggles among individuals within the social justice groups, the other side of racism, were not initially striking to me. In reflecting on these through conversation, I realize how significant it is for us to have these conversations. (Diane’s post-session journal, 2-3-16)

While Diane’s analysis did not change, the conversation offered her additional aspects to consider. Her comment, “In reflecting on these through conversation, I realize how significant it is for us to have these conversations” directly after her description of the

comments that “were not initially striking” for her, shows that she valued the collaboration and saw the importance the shared dialogue played in her own analysis and thought process.

Coming together for dinner and discussions, together Marie, Diane and I explored our interpretations of data sets during collaborative data analysis sessions. This chapter discusses the role these sessions played in addressing dominant researcher/participant roles in educational ethnographic research. The findings reveal certain benefits for both the research *process* and *product*, as well as for the researcher and research participants. These findings contribute to the larger conversations around the “methodological debates” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) that arise when a researcher’s identity varies so greatly from her participants’. They serve as a reminder, a silent nudge, that we must hold ourselves accountable and go *beyond* member checks when our positionality as researchers varies so greatly with those we want to accurately represent.

### **Discussion**

My rationale for conducting data analysis sessions was informed by my critical race theoretical framework, specifically storytelling and counterstorytelling as a tenet of CRT. This chapter supports the use of counterstorytelling as a data *analysis* tool in CRT-oriented research. By extending its use beyond the *collection* phase it not only shows promise of advancing our journey towards critical race *praxis* (Yamamoto, 1999; Lynn & Parker, 2006), but addresses many of the ethical considerations common to qualitative inquiry, particularly those related to white researchers’ examination of race-related issues. As this chapter illustrates, (re)conceptualizing *counterstorytelling* as a tool for data analysis allows both me, and my participants of color opportunities for “greater

narrative latitude” (Gubrium & Harper, 2013, p. 16) in producing ethnographic knowledge, breaking down traditional researcher-participant hierarchies in the process. In fact, the counter-analyses I provide in this chapter are the product of my collaboration with my research participants Marie and Diane.

Undoubtedly, my collaboration with participants of color who openly discussed issues of race and racism, impacted my racial literacy as an individual, and as a researcher. Not only did I learn new perspectives and gain a greater understanding through our discussions, this process also unveiled for me the role my whiteness plays in analyzing data. What struck me was the depth of analyses Marie and Diane offered during our sessions. This is in part a result of my collaborators’ identity as women of color and their ability to look at life through a racial lens. My whiteness, in this sense, shines through. As a white person I did not grow up noticing race, nor analyzing peoples’ words and actions through a racial lens. The depth of analysis of participants’ words featured in this chapter is a result of my collaboration with Marie and Diane. And while I chose to focus on excerpts from people of color with my participants of color, I realize how this act alone perpetuates whiteness as I question what I failed to analyze in examining white participants’ discourse. Imagine the impact a collaborative analysis session might serve in analyzing Dan’s words? Or those of Janet Miller? The need to collaborate is essential not only for research purposes, but also to learn from each other and continuously develop our racial literacy as individuals.

In sum, the findings from this chapter make a case for including our participants at all stages of our research. If education research intends to transform the educational outcomes of oppressed populations, research participants must increasingly serve as co-

researchers. Use of *counterstorytelling* as a data analysis tool refutes Duncan's (2005) argument that simply including narratives from people of color is insufficient in order to critically examine white supremacist ideology across our contexts. By furthering this construct into the analysis process we're offered greater means of examining hegemonic ideology.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Shifting demographics in the United States are resulting in an increased number of students of color in the nation's classrooms. While typically this trend has been witnessed in urban settings, more and more students of color are attending schools in non-urban locations. Cartfield, where students of color comprise close to 40% of the district's population, is one of these districts, and while settings like Cartfield have historically received little attention in racial (in)equity-related literature, the findings from this dissertation necessitate we shift our focus. Limiting education research to urban districts to explore racial inequity in education dismisses high-performing, well-resourced districts and portrays them as able to adequately serve an increasingly diverse demographic. Findings from this dissertation falsify this stance, uncovering the existing racial inequities by way of interviews, newspaper articles, public meetings, and forums. Statistics (e.g. suspension rates, graduation rates, test scores) further support the qualitative data.

Cartfield is representative of Alson's (2003) finding that the academic achievement gap in many suburban school districts between students of color and their white peers is greater than that in urban communities. In Cartfield, white students significantly outperform the majority of their peers of color. The performance indicators from various students of color subgroups reflect state averages- an acceptable level- while white students continue to excel at levels well above state average. Dangerous is the fact that because students of color perform *well enough* in Cartfield, the achievement gap goes unaddressed; what I call a *disguised* achievement gap.

Often looked to for their best practices, districts like Cartfield are not exempt from the systemic racism that even permeates within their school walls. Shifting our gaze towards such districts is crucial as more and more students of color populate these schools. And because this research has shifted our focus in an additional fashion, its findings also reveal that the achievement gap is not the only disguised element in the equation. While typically scholars examine the in-school factors that perpetuate or sustain racial inequity, turning our gaze outward, towards the community, exposes the disguised, out-of-school factors that work to sustain racial inequities in Cartfield's schools.

Using a racial literacy lens, and the *implementational spaces* construct borrowed from the field of education language policy and practice, this dissertation has uncovered how Cartfield's community members' varying displays of racial literacy, by way of their discourse and actions, is divisive, and serves as a disguised factor which sustains the in-school racial inequities. Noteworthy is the demonstrated power of community members by way of their actions, discourse, and silence. While in-school culture (e.g. teacher practices) certainly constitute ongoing examination, the out-of-school actors and factors, as the Cartfield community has demonstrated, call for increasing attention in education research. And while the in-school/out-of-school boundaries are often blurred (e.g. after-school clubs, extracurricular sports) such spaces also demand increasing attention in racial equity related research. How is the district's social-justice oriented mission operationalized in school-sponsored, extracurricular spaces, for example?

In sum, the findings from this dissertation point to the necessity of situating educational research in high-performing schools, and shifting our gaze towards out-of-



school spaces to expand our understanding of the factors that perpetuate and maintain racial inequity in our nation's schools.

### **Implications**

Exposing the factors that sustain education racial inequity through ethnographic research helps to make the familiar strange, and then work to address them. This section discusses the implications of this work for qualitative research in education, and for the Cartfield community- and beyond.

### **Qualitative Research in Education**

My ethnographic examination of my two research questions was facilitated by constructs that helped to unveil the findings. Below I describe the implications of drawing on implementational spaces, racial literacy, and counterstorytelling in this work.

To illustrate racism's interconnected layers, I drew on Hornberger & Johnson's (2007) onion metaphor from the field of language policy and practice. Exposing racism's multilayers situates an individual as an *active* participant in systemic racism, as opposed to one who is helpless in the larger system. To further illustrate this, I posit that unless one is actively working against it, individuals fall subject to racism, society's de facto policy (Gee & Ford, 2011). Use of implementational spaces helps to shift our gaze from those who are *affected* by racism, to those who perpetuate it, and how.

In using a racial literacy (Guinier, 2004) lens along with implementational spaces (Hornberger, 2002), this research not only uncovers the powerful role individual community members play in sustaining/resisting the in-school racial inequities, but the relationship between racial literacy and racism. Specifically looking at actors' discourse and actions in implementational spaces- critical moments that can serve to sustain the

status quo, or, contrarily, call attention to the racial inequities the status quo upholds- provided insight as to how community actors took up issues of race and racism through their discourse and actions, and resisted/sustained racial inequities in that process. To draw on Dueñas' (2015) words again, "while recognizing the power of policy [in this case racism as a de facto policy], the concept of ideological and implementational spaces ultimately rests on the ingenuity of individuals [their racial literacy practices included], who actively and creatively seize those openings, transforming and expanding them" (23). In this sense implementational spaces provides a framework that exposes the connection between participants' performance of racial literacy and their role in individual-group-systemic levels of racism.

Implementational spaces proves to be a beneficial framework beyond the field of language policy and practice, and shows promise in race-related research. Use of implementational spaces in combination with a racial literacy lens allow us to observe how micro-level actions impact systemic racism, and vise-versa. This framework positions individuals' actions as impacting systemic racism, rather than positioning individuals as being powerless against the domineering beast that is systemic racism. It allows us insight as to how an individual's discourse or actions influences the larger system, as well as how the larger system influences an individual person. In this sense, the use of implementational spaces has also surfaced the importance of one's racial literacy and the importance of fostering people's ability to "critically examine and continually question how race and racism inform beliefs, interpretive frameworks, practices, cultures, and institutions" (Winans, 2010, p. 477).

My intent of extending the construct of counterstorytelling to the data analysis process was to address, or at least further contemplate, the role of my whiteness in race-related research. As the findings in chapter VI reveal, the collaborative data analysis sessions with Marie and Diane were influential for both the research process and the research product. What I don't reflect on in great detail in chapter VI is the impact my collaboration with Marie and Diane had on my own racial literacy development, and the connection between a researcher's racial literacy and the research.

Usually my relationships with people of color surround activist work. Rarely do I sit down with people of color and have an intellectual conversation like those that took place during our collaborative sessions together. I realize the impact that these conversations had on me; specifically in helping me to realize how different, and perhaps even limiting my white perspective is in looking at the data. In reflecting further, I realize these limitations are a result of my own limited social circle. While I consider myself to be friendly with many people of color, I only have close friendships with a few women of color. The difference between "being friendly" and "friendships" is a level of trust that is required to share information from which one can learn and grow. Only through a certain depth of relationship will one become privy to information that provokes a deepened understanding and a heightened sense of racial literacy.

Thus, in thinking about racial literacy development, I would argue that there needs to be a level of authenticity. Personal connection plays a large part in how we receive information and gain a deeper understanding about the experiences of people of color with whom we are in contact. From a research perspective, this takes time, and if done in an unauthentic way runs greater risk of being exploitative in nature. The use of

collaborative data analysis sessions in this research unveiled the need for me to continue my own racial literacy development, but also solidified for me, a white woman, the need to conduct race-related research in partnership with fellow analyzers of color, in part because of the opportunity it provides to foster participants' racial literacy by sharing our stories and counterstories.

### **The Cartfield Community**

*We are so accustomed to disguise ourselves to others that in the end we become disguised to ourselves* –François de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680)

Just as Canagarajah (2006) notes in the field of language policy and practice, this research has uncovered spaces where there is potential to “counteract the unilateral hold of dominant paradigms and ideologies” (155). From its findings we can identify the instances that necessitate attention in order to address the disguised elements that work to sustain in-school racial inequity. In the spirit of critical race praxis, I end with a list of potential action steps that might shift Cartfield towards more racial equity in the district. While this list is informed by the findings from this research set in Cartfield, these suggestions are not limited to Cartfield community members alone.

### **Future Considerations**

- Reposition the role of the individual in racism. Racism is performed in covert ways (e.g. discourse) more frequently than it is acted on through overt, malicious acts.
- Talk about race. To draw on Genevieve's words, “the more we say the word ‘race’ and talk about race, and get comfortable with talking about race, the better”

- In addition to talking about race, label whiteness. Become familiar with how whiteness is performed and its role in sustaining racism, and label it when you see it.
- Advocate that people in positions of power (elected officials, school committee members, district superintendents) exhibit racial literacy. Require that job interviews vet for this factor by asking how applicants might handle race-related situations.
- Further develop racial literacy practices by developing authentic, interracial friendships.
- Be a watchdog. Julia noted the level of follow through that was needed with School Committee members; Thalia expressed keeping close watch on the material her children of color are learning; Bridget shared being more attentive about why everyone thinks the school are so great.
- Speak about your own experience, but only after acknowledging how yours might be different based on your identity descriptors.
- Be vulnerable; don't conceal your racial literacy or other knowledge. A kind approach to combatting racism, as Diane advised, is not often the most effective.

## APPENDIX A

### RACIAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AS A PROCESS

As the various definitions reflect, racial literacy positions race as something that must be directly addressed, rather than ignored (Guinier, 2004); “We develop racial literacy— our own and our students’—socially. That is, we learn about race and racism by talking about race and racism” (Bolgatz, 2005, p. 2). Because it is socially constructed, racial literacy, just as with reading and writing practices, evolves over time. In other words, one’s racial literacy development is better pictured as being on a sort of racist/anti-racist spectrum, where one is not viewed as being illiterate/literate, or racist/anti-racist, but embodying and displaying various degrees of racism.

Many anti-racist identity development models reflect a similar stance, and show that people’s anti-racist identity development happens in stages. One such model is the *The Ladder of Empowerment*. I include a brief discussion about this model to show how the ladder can help white people reflect upon our identity as white people within a system that assumes white superiority, while also helping us to challenge that assumption and understand the commitments and embrace an anti-racist identity. My focus on white people as the beneficiaries and users of this of this model is not to suggest that people of color are not responsible for or exempt from practicing racial literacy, this particular model is geared towards white people as they understand racism differently than most people of color who experience the effects of racism.

#### The Ladder of Empowerment

There are numerous models that examine (e.g. Helms, 1995; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001) anti-racist identity development. To illustrate the idea that one’s racial

literacy development falls on a spectrum, I feature a model used in the *Whites Confronting Racism* workshop I attended in June 2016 facilitated by Dr. Ali Michael and Dr. Sarah Halley, both educators, researchers, and consultants at The Race Institute for Educators. I attended the 3-day workshop to explore further how my whiteness and racism impact my role as an educator, parent, citizen, and as a researcher who examines racial inequities in education.

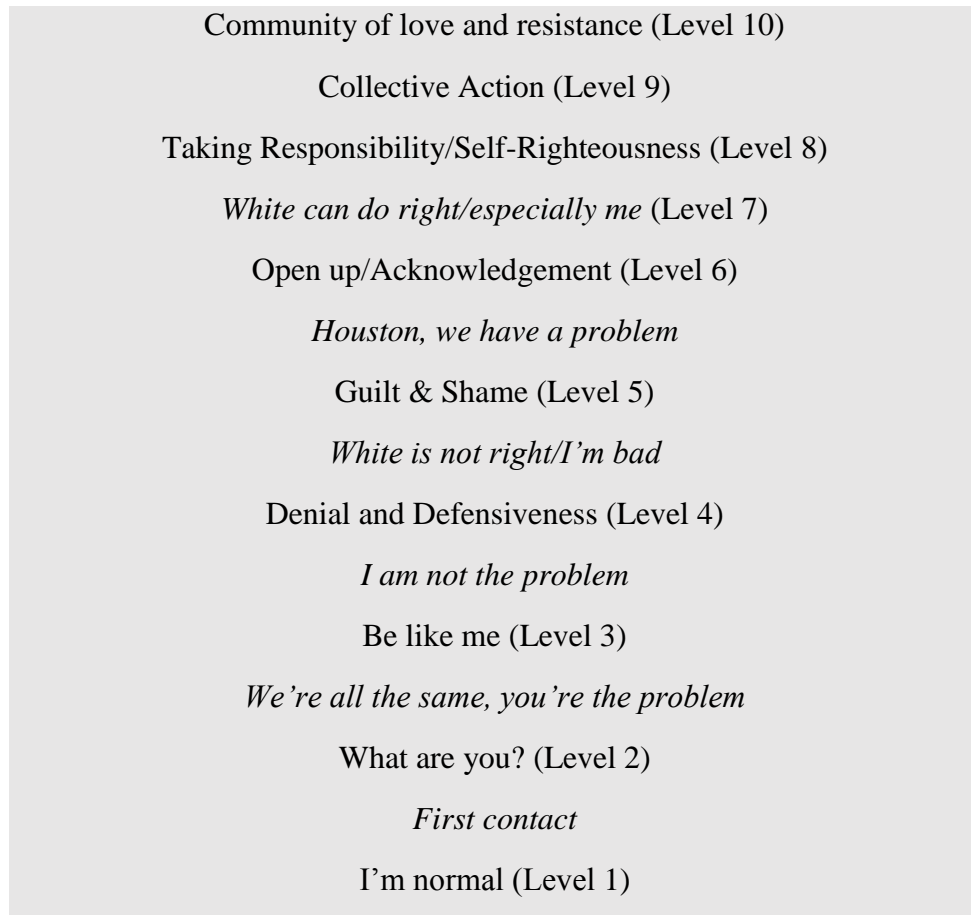
The Ladder was developed by multiple people<sup>17</sup> as a tool to help whites recognize where we are in the process of understanding our identity within a racist system that positions whites as superior to other races. It enables us to mark our progress in challenging this assumption and replacing it with an anti-racist identity, one that relinquishes individual racist acts *and* recognizes and actively opposes systemic racism. This second aspect is particularly important as anti-racism practice is not simply the act of refraining from racist actions, but rather entails actively working to change the systems in place that sustain inequities, a point I emphasize above. Our anti-racist identity affects how we live our lives politically, socially and economically. The ladder is not to be used to judge ourselves or others, but to identify where we, and where others are in the process

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<sup>17</sup> The Ladder was developed with the contributions of numerous people including Andrea Ayvazian (PDF Dismantling Racism curriculum); Janet Helms (“An update of Helms’ White and People of Color Racial Identity Models” in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, Sage, 1995); dRworks trainers (dRworks Dismantling Racism curriculum, including Bree Carlson, Meredith Dean, M.E. Duueker, Alice Johnson, Michelle Johnson, Kenneth Jones, John Lunsford, Suzanne Plihcik); Paul Kivel (in *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, 1995); Joan Olsson (in *Detour Spotting for White Anti-racists*, Cultural Bridges, PA, 1997); Beverly Tatum (*Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* 1997); and hundreds of participants in Dismantling Racism workshops. dRworks is a group of trainers, educators and organizers helping to build and connect grassroots organizations and communities grounded in an understanding of history, culture and power analysis. [www.dismantlingracism.org](http://www.dismantlingracism.org)

of developing an anti-racist identity, and what supports we/they need to continue to advance. (For a full summary of each stage please see below)

Figure 7. Ladder of Empowerment: Becoming an Anti-Racist Ally



Important to note is that in the process of developing an anti-racist identity people may step up or step down the ladder as they advance or regress at various points.

Singleton and Linton (2006) point out, “like any developmental scale, White people might show aspects of their current experience in more than one stage on the continuum...people are probably never stationary or fixed in their racial identity development” (203). Okum (n.d.) specifies further, explaining that as one moves up on



the ladder, one must go through each stage (e.g. one cannot jump from level 3 to level 6 without advancing to level 4 and 5 first. Unlike moving up, however, it is possible to skip steps in moving down. For instance, one might drop from level 6 to level 3 without going through stages 5 and 4 first. These advancements or regressions can happen in any time frame.

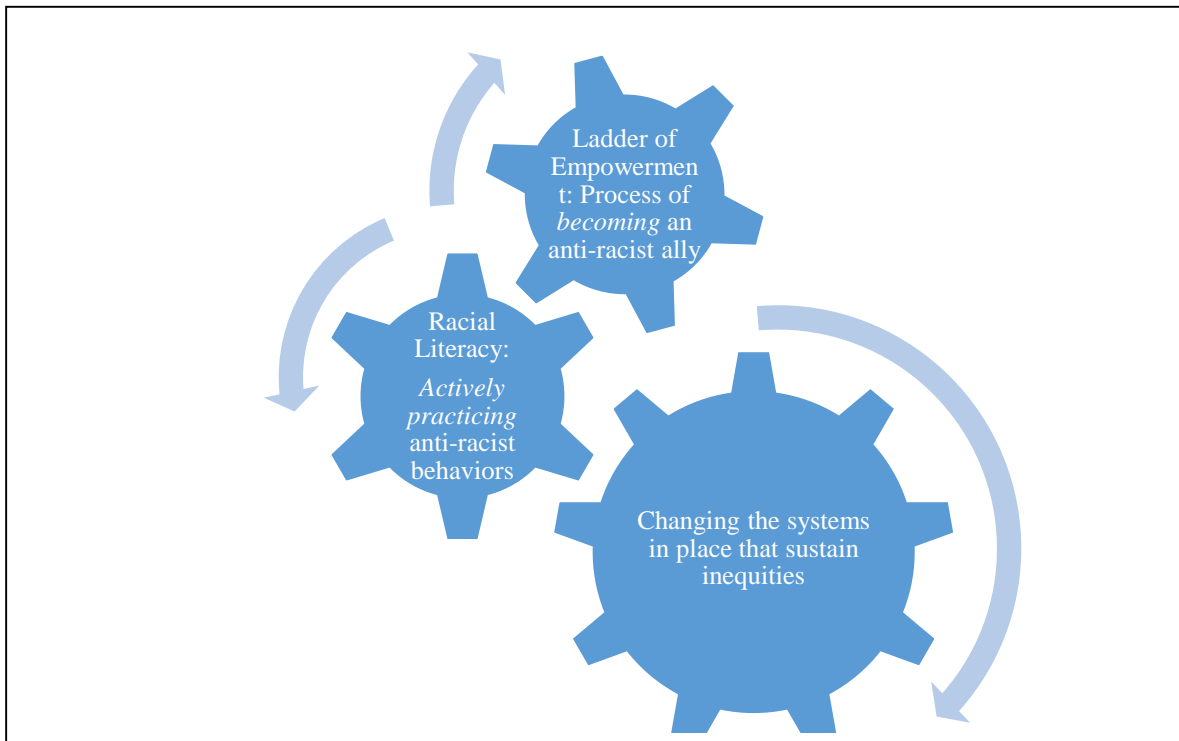
We move up and down this ladder in a lifetime, in a year, in a week, in a day, in an hour. The lower we are on the ladder, the more we collude, or cooperate, with racism. In fact, one of the ways that institutional and cultural racism works is to keep pushing us down the ladder (Okum, n.d., p. 3)

White people (and, as I will argue, people of color) are at different points on the ladder, highlighting that a racist/anti-racist, or racially literate/illiterate binary does not exist, and that we are at varying stages in our anti-racist identity development.

To be able to practice racial literacy as Winans (2010) described, a person must acknowledge racism, and thus be at a certain level in his/her anti-racist identity development process (Level 6 perhaps). By examining people's discourse and actions we are able to identify where they are, in that moment, in their anti-racist identity development process (where they are on the ladder), and thus if they can recognize and oppose racism- "the maintenance of, and acquiescence in, racialized hierarchies governing resource distribution" (Guinier, 2004, p. 98). I created Figure 8 to display how *becoming* an anti-racist ally and *practicing* anti-racist behaviors work in tandem to shift societal norms. Just as with gears, one toothed wheel works with another to put a third gear in motion. At the same time, gears have the ability to reverse direction. In this metaphor, when this happens, the societal norms can shift our anti-racism identity development, moving us down the ladder perhaps- reflecting what Okum (n.d.) states is a

possibility. Figure 8 further illustrates how racism's multiple layers (system, group and individual) are impacted by one another and work in tandem to move people back and forth along a racism-awareness spectrum.

Figure 8. Relationship between Developing and Practicing an Anti-Racist Identity



#### Ladder of Empowerment Stages

Taken from Marino, L. & Mattheus, A. (2011). *Whites confronting racism handbook*. Self-published, 24-26

#### **I'm Normal**

In this stage, we:

- Do not see ourselves as white.
- Assume racial differences are unimportant.
- Are naive about the connection of power to race and racism or oppression (we do not have a power analysis).
- Have little experience with people of color.
- Believe people of color want to assimilate.
- See all issues of race as individual.

## **What Are You?**

In this stage, we:

- Have our first contact with people of color.
- Notice they are not like us (happens as early as age 3).
- Work to make sense of the difference, particularly if we associate the difference with additional information about unfairness or discrimination.
- Begin to notice our own prejudices, or those of our family.
- See issues of race as individual; have not developed a power analysis.

## **Be Like Me**

In this stage, we:

- Want to be seen as an individual.
- Begin to make sense of white privilege with little or no awareness yet of power.
- Believe we can “flatten out” differences; believe in the importance of “fairness”.
- Feel apologetic, guilty, or fearful toward people of color.
- See racism as a problem between individuals.
- Over-identify with people of color or think people of color should “just get over it”.
- Can see the differences as “exotic” or “erotic”.
- Don't see ourselves as part of the problem.

## **Denial and Defensiveness**

In this stage, we:

- Are forced to see ourselves as part of the dominant group.
- Blame people of color for creating their problems.
- Deny any privileged or power we have as members of the white group.
- Believe people of color aren't trying hard enough.
- Look for evidence of reverse discrimination.
- Insist the playing field is level.
- Believe in the power of the individual above all.

## **Guilt, Shame, and Blame**

In this stage, we:

- Really feel and think that racism is a big problem and we are part of that problem.
- Understand at some level that we are racist.
- Feel guilt and shame, often deeply.
- Blame people of color for racism as a way of avoiding our guilt and shame.
- Either feel extremely responsible for racism (sometimes taking it on as our primary issue) or deny any responsibility at all for racism (I am not racist).

## **Opening Up/Acknowledgement**

In this stage, we:

- Relate to people of color who are like us.
- Are often frustrated by separation (by caucusing, for example).
- Feel apologetic for our privileges.
- Have a general understanding that racism is a problem without a strong analysis of the ways in which it is personal, institutional, and cultural.
- See racism as a results of flaws in the system (as opposed to understanding that the system is founded on racism).
- Can over-identify with people of color.
- “Celebrate” diversity, without understanding the power dynamics of racism.

## **Taking Responsibility/Self-Righteousness**

At this stage, we:

- See ourselves as part of the white group and begin to take responsibility for our power and privilege as part of the white group.
- Continue to have feelings of guilt, anger, frustration, but also of joy because of deepening relationships and increased multicultural experience.
- Distinguish between commitment and perfection.
- See challenges as teachers; value self-reflection.
- Participate in individual and collective action.
- Use are racist thoughts and behavior too deepen understanding; change thoughts and behaviors.
- Think of ourselves as separate from and “better” than most other white people.
- Feel commitment to anti-racist work very deeply, leading to self-righteousness.

## **Collective Action**

In this stage, we:

- Participate in individual and collective action to address racism on the personal, institutional, and cultural levels.
- Work to make strategic changes and organizations / communities consistent with anti-racist analysis and vision.
- Seek to address institutional racism.
- Work collectively with other white anti-racist allies and people of color.
- Claim our identity as a white person in a racist society.
- Know this work requires learning from mistakes.

## **Community of Love and Resistance**

In this stage, which we are all still seeking to achieve, we are living and working in strong anti-racist organizations and communities, with all the complexities and challenges such a vision brings. We are:

- Consistently organizing and building a community that has the power to heal the remnants of racism, internalized racist oppression, and internalized white supremacy.
- Constructing organizations and communities that can help us think critically and develop an analysis and understanding of the community, country, and world.
- Constructing organizations and communities with life-sustaining cultures that balance the needs of the individual and those of the community.

## APPENDIX B

### SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING TRANSCRIPTIONS

Job #	School committee meeting date	Description of sequence	Start-to-end time	Total time
1	10-22-13	Professional development goals surrounding equity in the district	1 min 55 sec- 16 min	14 min
2	11-12-13	Active bystander excerpt & other responses to 10-22-13 SC comments	4 min-23 min 30 sec & 25 min-26 min	20 min
3	12-3-13	Parent questions lack of response from SC	29 min- 31 min 40 sec	3 min
4	1-28-14	Public comment (e.g. student re: disparities)	21 min- 32 min	11 min
5	2-11-14	-Event description by Superintendent	7min 30 sec- 9 min 30 sec	2 min
6	3-25-14	-Teacher's speech & public comment	Beginning -1h10min	70 min
7	4-8-14	Public comments	Beginning - 30 min	30 min
8	5-27-14	Public comments	3 min 25 sec- 15 min	13 min
9	6-10-14	Public comments	15 min- 58 min	45 min
10	6-24-14	Public comments	19 min- 1 h 43 min	84 min
10a	9-16-14	Public comments	3 min- 16 min	13 min
11	11-20-14	Public comments	5 min 45 sec -1 h 10 min	74 min
12	4-14-15	Public comments	2 min- 4 min	2 min
13	6-2-15	Presentation by SCT for policy that advocates for qualitative (PAR) research in the district	Selected excerpts	
14	6-23-15	Final SC meeting of academic year	Selected excerpts	
15	11-10-15	Discussion and voting on SCT's proposed policy	Selected excerpts	
	TOTAL		<b>381 min</b> (approx. 6.5 hours to transcribe)	

## **APPENDIX C**

### **GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Demographic questions- How do you identify yourself according to: Gender? Race? Socioeconomic level? Decade in which you were born?
2. Describe your involvement in the town/schools. When did you move here? In what capacity are you familiar with the schools (e.g. children attend(ed) schools, school employee, school committee member (past or present))
3. How would you describe Cartfield?
4. How do you describe the school system?
5. Describe your perception of the racial climate in Cartfield?
6. How do you define racial equity in your own words?
7. Do you believe there racial equity in Cartfield Schools? Why or why not (what examples do you draw on to support your view?)
8. How would you describe your role in issues surrounding racial (in)equity in Cartfield/Cartfield schools?
9. Which community groups do consider yourself a member of?
10. When did you join these groups?
11. What brought you to your involvement in these community groups?
12. What is the focus of the work in these groups? What is the group's mission?
13. How do you know when you're meeting the mission? What does this change look like?
14. What are the obstacles you face in getting there?
15. What assists you in getting there?
16. What are powerful tactics in getting your message across?
17. Describe a particular event that has helped/hindered Cartfield residents' awareness around issues of racial inequity.
18. What other questions would you like me to ask you that I haven't? /Is there other information you'd like to tell me aside from what we've spoken about already?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **COLLABORATIVE DATA ANALYSIS PRE-SESSION JOURNAL PROMPT**

Please take a few minutes to respond to the following prompt.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Description of data set reviewed in today's session:

---

What is your initial interpretation of the data set? What speaks to you? What themes or conclusions do you arrive at in reading through the data set?



## **APPENDIX E**

### **COLLABORATIVE DATA ANALYSIS POST-SESSION JOURNAL PROMPT**

Please take a few minutes to respond to the following prompt.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Description of data set reviewed in today's session:

---

By the end of the session, what was your interpretation of the data set?

Did your initial interpretation of this data set's components change from your initial, independently conducted analysis?

What changed this interpretation? Was it someone else's perspective? Whose? And what did that person say that made you consider another perspective?

## APPENDIX F

### DIANE SHERRY'S PUBLIC STATEMENT AT THE 3-25-14 SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

I wish to thank all of you who took the time from your daily concerns to support me during this extremely painful time. Your presence here tonight and at the meeting last Friday, your notes, emails, phone calls have all served to greatly lift my spirits and to show me that I am not alone in this struggle – that our educators, neighbors, parents and children of color are not alone. I was particularly moved by the banner that my students made as their gesture of solidarity with me. It is beautiful. I felt your love and sincerity. Thank you!

My name is Diane Sherry. I am a mother. I am a teacher. I am your neighbor. I am the target of several malicious, hostile AND racial attacks at Cartfield Regional High School - attacks which seemed to escalate over time, quite possibly because the response to them has been so anemic!

Please know that I have thought long and hard about these vicious, racist attacks. They are attempts to dehumanize ME and all people of color. But really, they dehumanize us all! The sluggish response of the school administrators leading up to this most recent attack is a sad indication that the need for racial consciousness and sensitivity is low on this administration's list of priorities. It speaks to a culture of racism that exists in this school about which there is persistent denial!

I have been a teacher for thirteen years. For thirteen years I have stood before and instructed and loved your children; for thirteen years I have fought to demystify [school subject] for all children, but especially for children who somehow feel locked out of its so-called impartial and objective discourses. I am the teacher, the "other-mother" of your children; when you entrust them daily to our care, it is a task that I embrace with joy. Teaching your children is for me one of life's greatest blessings. This is why I feel it IS my job to advocate vigorously on their behalf so that they can be on the receiving end of the best possible education it is their **right** to have.

But they cannot have the best possible education when the school systematically ignores their ways of being, styles of learning, needs and wants. I speak especially about our children of color who are disproportionately left out of honors classes and, as a result, will most like not be considered for admission to college programs that require advanced [school subject] a prerequisite. Their future is contained way before they graduate high school. My presence here, therefore, is to challenge the school committee, superintendent and principal to rethink the way we do schooling so that it is an affirming and safe and validating space for ALL children. Not a place that routinely sends the subtle and not – so-subtle message to our children that, "all [students] are created equal, but some are more equal than others." Racism thrives in such spaces and it seems it is thriving here. I am here also because I was targeted and my attacks and attackers were not addressed openly but treated with silence! Racism thrives in silence, and it is thriving here. I was attacked and had to be the one to devise and lead in my own defense. My attacks were

met with equivocation, indecision, sanitized statements to address them. It told me my person, my sense of security, my safety, were not this administration's top concerns. It told me all teachers are created equal, but some are more equal than others. It was repeatedly said that the racist note did not threaten violence. I beg to differ! Given the violent history of that word, the years of violent oppression and humiliation associated with it; the use of it to commit the most awful and heinous crimes in the history of this nation – **how could you even think the use of this word does not threaten violence?** The word “nigger” attacks and demeans me, its intent to render me less than human, it makes it OK to diminish me, my son, your sons and daughters, you – but not just people of color – it diminishes the user, it diminishes us all! And it especially diminishes those who stand silently by and do nothing!

To this end, I ask you administrators for the following:

- Do not rest in your investigation until the person or persons responsible for these criminal acts are caught and brought to justice.
- I ask for your firmest assurance of my safety in this building. Clearly, if there are those who see me as less than human, then I am at risk for more attacks and who knows how that could end? Please also know that if I have to operate effectively as a professional in service of other people's children I cannot do it looking over my shoulders.
- I ask for your commitment to the address of structural, systemic racism. It is manifested in all facets of school life without the consciousness of its pervasive existence. For instance, how can our classroom cultures become inclusive – locales for ideas that privilege none over the other. Or how may we consider the learning styles of ALL students and build that into classroom practice so ALL voices are valued and have an equal say in the learning community – not by separating students from each other through institutional tracking, but of having students learn from each other's perspectives and point of views in the same space? How may we even consider the use of images/icons/symbols/historical and cultural references that reflect our diversity? I know these are not easy demands. But we are not called to ease! We are called to EDUCATE!

My name is Diane Sherry and I AM a teacher! Thank you!!

## **APPENDIX G**

### **PETITION PRESENTED TO SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS ON 11-20-14 IN SUPPORT OF DIANE SHERRY**

Whereas, Diane Sherry, an outstanding teacher was subjected to repeated racist, threatening notes and vandalism-graffiti at the Cartfield Regional High School during the 2013-2014 school year, and suffers post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result; and,

Whereas, the school district has unilaterally placed her on unpaid medical leave, so that she is left without income to support herself and her child; and,

Whereas, the school district has refused to meet with her, to explore alternatives, to negotiate, or even discuss the situation with her and her attorneys, but instead, offered a termination settlement with unacceptable conditions; and,

Whereas, Diane Sherry is an exemplary teacher [school subject omitted to protect confidentiality], with consistently outstanding evaluations; and,

Whereas, she is African American, a teacher our schools should be going to great lengths to support and retain for the benefit of all of our students; and,

Whereas, Ms. Sherry has done nothing wrong; and,

Whereas, we deeply value our schools and want them to be excellent in every way and to serve all our students and families with the highest possible quality education; and

Whereas, we want our school system to support all our teachers, including Diane Sherry, and work with her to seek justice and reach a mutually acceptable agreement;

We, the undersigned, urge the Cartfield-Portland Regional School District to meet and negotiate with Ms. Sherry and her attorneys to resolve the issues contained in her [law suit].

We further urge the District to disavow the statement made by [name omitted], the school district's attorney, regarding Ms. Sherry's claims of mistreatment as "baseless" allegations (*Chronicle Herald*).

We stand firm with Diane Sherry recognizing that the racist attacks that plague her harm all of us as well. To this end, we call upon the School District to treat Diane Sherry with the dignity and respect she deserves by vigorously pursuing an immediate resolution to her complaint: one that is fair, equitable and just.

Sincerely, Members of the Community

## APPENDIX H

### CERTIFICATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL (ORIGINAL)



#### Certification of Human Subjects Approval

**Date:** November 6, 2015

**To:** Kathleen Lazdowski, Teacher Educ & Curriculum Stud

**Other Investigator:** Laura Valdiviezo, Education, School of

**From:** Lynnette Leidy Sievert, Chair, UMASS IRB

Protocol Title: Lazdowski- Dissertation: Countering the "strong school system" narrative: Community reactions to racial inequity in a high-performing, suburban district

Protocol ID: 2015-2551

Review Type: EXPEDITED - NEW

Paragraph ID: 6,7

Approval Date: 11/06/2015

Expiration Date: 11/05/2016

OGCA #:

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Massachusetts Amherst IRB, Federal Wide Assurance # 00003909. Approval is granted with the understanding that investigator(s) are responsible for:

**Modifications** - All changes to the study (e.g. protocol, recruitment materials, consent form, additional key personnel), must be submitted for approval in e-protocol before instituting the changes. New personnel must have completed CITI training.

**Consent forms** - A copy of the approved, validated, consent form (with the IRB stamp) must be used to consent each subject. Investigators must retain copies of signed consent documents for six (6) years after close of the grant, or three (3) years if unfunded.

**Adverse Event Reporting** - Adverse events occurring in the course of the protocol must be reported in e-protocol as soon as possible, but no later than five (5) working days.

**Continuing Review** - Studies that received Full Board or Expedited approval must be reviewed three weeks prior to expiration, or six weeks for Full Board. Renewal Reports are submitted through e-protocol.

**Completion Reports** - Notify the IRB when your study is complete by submitting a Final Report Form in e-protocol.

Consent form (when applicable) will be stamped and sent in a separate e-mail. Use only IRB approved copies of the consent forms, questionnaires, letters, advertisements etc. in your research.

Please contact the Human Research Protection Office if you have any further questions. Best wishes for a successful project.

## APPENDIX I

### CERTIFICATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL (RENEWED)



#### Certification of Human Subjects Approval

**Date:** November 7, 2016

**To:** Kathleen Lazdowski, Teacher Educ & Curriculum Stud

**Other Investigator:** Laura Valdiviezo, Education

**From:** Lynnette Leidy Sievert, Chair, UMASS IRB

Protocol Title: Lazdowski- Dissertation: Countering the "strong school system" narrative: Community reactions to racial inequity in a high-performing, suburban district

Protocol ID: 2015-2551

Review Type: EXPEDITED - RENEWAL

Paragraph ID: 6,7

Approval Date: 11/07/2016

Expiration Date: 11/05/2017

OGCA #:

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Massachusetts Amherst IRB, Federal Wide Assurance # 00003909. Approval is granted with the understanding that investigator(s) are responsible for:

**Modifications** - All changes to the study (e.g. protocol, recruitment materials, consent form, additional key personnel), must be submitted for approval in e-protocol before instituting the changes. New personnel must have completed CITI training.

**Consent forms** - A copy of the approved, validated, consent form (with the IRB stamp) must be used to consent each subject. Investigators must retain copies of signed consent documents for six (6) years after close of the grant, or three (3) years if unfunded.

**Adverse Event Reporting** - Adverse events occurring in the course of the protocol must be reported in e-protocol as soon as possible, but no later than five (5) working days.

**Continuing Review** - Studies that received Full Board or Expedited approval must be reviewed three weeks prior to expiration, or six weeks for Full Board. Renewal Reports are submitted through e-protocol.

**Completion Reports** - Notify the IRB when your study is complete by submitting a Final Report Form in e-protocol.

Consent form (when applicable) will be stamped and sent in a separate e-mail. Use only IRB approved copies of the consent forms, questionnaires, letters, advertisements etc. in your research.

Please contact the Human Research Protection Office if you have any further questions. Best wishes for a successful project.

## APPENDIX J

### INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

#### INFORMED CONSENT UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

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Principal Investigator: Kathleen A. Lazdowski

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Sponsor: Laura A. Valdiviezo, Professor, College of Education

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#### **PURPOSE OF THIS FORM:**

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:**

Statistics show that the academic achievement gap in many suburban school districts between students of color and their white peers is greater than that in urban communities (Alson, 2003). Despite this, there is scant literature that looks at racial inequity in suburban settings. This silence (falsely) suggests that racial inequities are limited to urban settings, which in turn reinforces the status quo. This research project addresses this gap. It examines the cultural factors within a suburban community that sustain the racial inequity that occurs in its schools. How do the out-of-school events sustain what happens in school? What role do parents, community members, administrators play in sustaining or disrupting these inequities?

The research will be conducted by Kathleen (Katie) Lazdowski (klazdows@educ.umass.edu), a doctoral candidate at the College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst, under the supervision of Professor Laura Valdiviezo (lav@educ.umass.edu).

#### **PROCEDURES:**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in the following activities:

- With your consent, you will participate in interviews (one-on-one) with the researcher. You will be asked to discuss your experiences in the community groups in which you participate.
- Only if you agree, your responses from the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The audio files and the transcriptions will be stored in a password sensitive location, to which the researcher only has access.
- You may be contacted in the future for follow-up interviews.
- All files will be deleted once the study is finished.

**RISK**

Some of the discussions might foster emotional reactions such as feelings of frustration, or helplessness. Participants are free to skip any questions they choose not to answer, or stop at any time. If you suffer from emotional distress I will help you seek the support from a professional counselor or therapist. You are welcome to stop your participation in this study at any time.

**BENEFITS**

There are no specific direct benefits associated with participating in this study. However, participation in this study contributes to a larger exploration of racial inequity in education. This study allows participants opportunities to provide the researcher with data that will assist in exploring how community members uncover, resist, and/or sustain the racial inequity that exists in schools.

**COSTS & COMPENSATION**

There are no costs associated with participating in this study and participants will not receive any compensation.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The researcher will not deliberately interfere or disrupt the activities taking place in the research site. Therefore, individuals who do not participate in this study will not suffer any consequences.

**SUBJECT ENROLLMENT/LENGTH OF STUDY**

This study will be conducted during late 2015- mid 2016. You will be asked to participate in a total of 2-3 interviews, each lasting one-two hours in length. Participants may be contacted in the future for follow-up interviews.

**CONFIDENTIALITY** Information produced by this study will be confidential and private. Audiofiles and transcriptions will be kept in a secure, password protected file to which the researcher only has access. If information is used for publication in the literature or for presentations at academic conferences, only pseudonyms will be used (participants' real names and other identifiers will be removed from their work and pseudonyms or "fake names" will be used to protect confidentiality.)

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

You are under no obligation to participate in this project. You may withdraw your participation at any time without prejudice.

**REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Should you have any questions about the project or any other research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Katie Lazdowski at (617) 309-6059. If you would like to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, you may contact Linda Griffin, Associate Dean, College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst at (413) 545-6985. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you



may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or [humansubjects@ora.umass.edu](mailto:humansubjects@ora.umass.edu).

## SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form and it was explained to me in a language that I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that, by signing this document, I do not waive any of my legal rights. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

**Please initial those statements with which you agree:**

\_\_\_\_ I agree to be interviewed

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded during the interviews.

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Subject's Name (Print or type)	Date
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Signature

Date

**STUDY REPRESENTATIVE STATEMENT:**

I have explained the purpose of the research, the study procedures, the possible risks and discomforts, the possible benefits, and have answered any questions to the best of my ability.

Study Representative Name (Print or Type)	Date
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Signature	Date
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## APPENDIX K

### COLLABORATIVE DATA ANALYSIS GROUP CONSENT FORM

#### INFORMED CONSENT UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

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Principal Investigator: Kathleen A. Lazdowski

Sponsor: Laura A. Valdiviezo, Professor, College of Education

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#### **PURPOSE OF THIS FORM:**

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:**

Statistics show that the academic achievement gap in many suburban school districts between students of color and their white peers is greater than that in urban communities (Alson, 2003). Despite this, there is scant literature that looks at racial inequity in suburban settings. This silence (falsely) suggests that racial inequities are limited to urban settings, which in turn reinforces the status quo. This research project addresses this gap. It examines the cultural factors within a suburban community that sustain the racial inequity that occurs in its schools. How do the out-of-school events sustain what happens in school? What role do parents, community members, administrators play in sustaining or disrupting these inequities?

In addition, this research explores the use of a tool for collaborative analysis with participants, and its implications for issues of representation in education research.

The research will be conducted by Kathleen Lazdowski (klazdows@educ.umass.edu), a doctoral candidate at the College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst, under the supervision of Professor Laura Valdiviezo (lav@educ.umass.edu).

#### **PROCEDURES:**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in the following activities:

- With your consent, you will participate in collaborative data analysis sessions. This will entail reading and interpreting data sets previously collected by the researcher, and sharing your interpretations with other members of the group.
- With your consent, these data analysis sessions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The audio files and the transcriptions will be stored in a password sensitive location, to which only the researcher has access.

- With your consent, you will be asked to complete pre-session and post-session journal prompts. Again, these journals will be stored in a locked location, to which only the researcher has access.

### **RISK**

Some of the discussions might foster emotional reactions such as feelings of frustration, or helplessness. Participants are free to skip any questions they choose not to answer, or stop at any time. If you suffer from emotional distress I will help you seek the support from a professional counselor or therapist. You are welcome to stop your participation in this study at any time.

### **BENEFITS**

There are no specific direct benefits associated with participating in this study. However, participation in this study contributes to a larger exploration of racial inequity in education. This study allows participants opportunities to provide the researcher with data that will assist in exploring how community members uncover, resist, and/or sustain the racial inequity that exists in schools. In addition, your involvement in the collaborative analysis sessions will allow me to examine more inclusive methods in educational research.

### **COSTS & COMPENSATION**

There are no costs associated with participating in this study and participants will not receive any compensation.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The researcher will not deliberately interfere or disrupt the activities taking place in the research site. Therefore, individuals who do not participate in this study will not suffer any consequences.

### **SUBJECT ENROLLMENT/LENGTH OF STUDY**

This portion of the study will be conducted during late 2015- May 2016. You will be asked to participate in a total of 4-5 data analysis sessions, each lasting no more than two hours in length. At the beginning and end of the session participants will be asked to complete a pre-session journal entry (15 minutes) and a post-session journal entry (15 minutes). Ninety minutes will be dedicated to discussing the data set. In total, participants can expect to commit 8-10 hours.

**CONFIDENTIALITY** Information produced by this study will be confidential and private. Audiofiles, transcriptions and pre- and post-session journal prompts will be kept in a secure, password protected file to which the researcher only has access. If information is used for publication in the literature or for presentations at academic conferences, only pseudonyms will be used (participants' real names and other identifiers will be removed from their work and pseudonyms or "fake names" will be used to protect confidentiality.)

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

You are under no obligation to participate in this project. You may withdraw your participation at any time without prejudice.

## **REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Should you have any questions about the project or any other research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Kathleen Lazdowski at (617) 309-6059. If you would like to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, you may contact Linda Griffin, Associate Dean, College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst at (413) 545-6985. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or [humansubjects@ora.umass.edu](mailto:humansubjects@ora.umass.edu)

## **SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

When signing this form I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form and it was explained to me in a language that I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that, by signing this document, I do not waive any of my legal rights. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

**Please initial those statements with which you agree:**

\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in collaborative data analysis sessions

\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded during the collaborative data analysis sessions

\_\_\_\_ I agree to respond to and provide the researcher with pre- and post-session journal prompts for each of the collaborative data sessions.

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Subject's Name (Print or type)

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Date

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Signature

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Date

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